

# COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many of the New Testament documents are occasional letters. This means that they were written in response to some definite questions, problems, and circumstances that were present at the time. As Paul writes his letter to Galatia, the church there has been infiltrated by false teachers, or Judaizers. They have started to persuade the converts that in order to be right with God, in order to be saved, it is necessary for them to become Jews. This entails submission to the rite of circumcision and to the law of Moses. Moreover, in the process of turning the Galatians away from the gospel, it appears that these false teachers have introduced doubt regarding Paul's qualifications, authority, and motive. Therefore, in his defense of the gospel, the apostle must also defend his ministry.

Paul realizes that in adopting the doctrine of the Judaizers, the Galatians are turning away from the gospel that was first preached to them. This is the message of justification by faith alone – that is, a person is made righteous according to the divine standard only because of God's sovereign grace and Christ's atoning work apart from human lineage, decision, and effort. Since this message is pivotal to salvation, and one that divides true religion from false religion, Paul writes his letter to provide a corrective on this urgent matter.

Besides the fact that it is the product of divine revelation, the enduring significance of this letter is ensured by several factors. First, it gives a clear statement of the core of the gospel, that we are saved through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a faith that comes as a sovereign gift from God, and not through obedience to the law or the effort of the flesh. Second, it defines for us the place that this teaching has in the spectrum of biblical doctrines, and in fact, in the spectrum of all the ideas ever introduced to humankind. The third point closely follows the second, as the apostle models for us the kind of fierce vigilance with which we must guard this doctrine, the ultimate curse with which we must attack and condemn its detractors, and the harsh reprimand with which we must admonish those who stray from it. In all of this, the apostle exhibits a number of assumptions that also carry significance for our doctrine and ministry.

## **GALATIANS 1:1-5**

**Paul, an apostle -- sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers with me,**

**To the churches in Galatia:**

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

This opening passage foreshadows the personal and doctrinal issues that Paul will address in the body of his letter.

We do not know the exact words the Judaizers used to undermine Paul's ministry, but we can infer from his response some of the things that they might have said. He asserts that he is an apostle "sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father." It is likely that at the very beginning of his letter, he wishes to counter one of the accusations against him, that he is in fact not an apostle, or that he derives his authority and message not from Christ, but from mere men. So he begins by taking a firm stand regarding his ministry.

As one of the apostles, he has direct authorization from Christ to make definitive doctrinal pronouncements and the power to exercise church discipline. The Galatians did not hear the gospel from an inferior, unreliable, or even a secondhand source, but from an authoritative messenger sent directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father. At this point, the emphasis is on the authenticity and authority of the *messenger* and not the message. The latter will come up soon enough, and since Paul will say more about this, we will reserve additional comments for later.

He is an apostle sent neither "from *men* nor by *man*" – that is, he derives his authority neither from a group of men nor from an individual man. It is true that men have placed their hands upon him and sent him off to preach the gospel (Acts 13:3), but it was the Holy Spirit who called him out. It is on the basis of this divine commission and not any human recognition that Paul asserts the validity of his ministry. Indeed, as far as human recognition is concerned, his ministry is not universally accepted. This is one of the challenges that he would face time after time in his ministry, for example, not only here in Galatians, but also in his letters to the Corinthians.

There is a lesson here for how Christians should regard their ministers and how ministers should regard themselves. Although denominational ordinations, seminary degrees, and apprenticeships under prominent leaders often have something to do with the spiritual equipping of a minister and could add to a person's credibility in the eyes of men,

credentials from a human institutions or individuals can never impart the authority and power that come from a divine call.

If a minister thinks that he is authorized to preach *because* he has received credentials from his denomination, then what happens when he has to face a congregation that belongs to another denomination, and especially one that rejects the authority of his own? It is not the denominational credentials that undermine his ministry, but it is his conscious reliance on them that is self-defeating.

Then, most of us know what happens with seminary degrees. When a person claims expertise because of his seminary degree, the matter does not end there, but we are also interested in the institution that he attended. And if it is a seminary that is known for doctrines and practices that we find objectionable, it becomes easy to dismiss the person before we find out anything more about him. So a minister who thinks that he speaks with authority *because* he has a seminary degree faces a similar problem as one who depends on his denominational credentials. He appeals to things that have no spiritual authority in themselves, and he allows people to sweep him into narrow cliques so that those on the outside find no reason to pay him any attention.

Church credentials, seminary degrees, human endorsements, letters of recommendations, and so on, all have their roles. Some may even regard ordination as a means of grace. However, one can exercise the full power and liberty that come from the divine call only if he ministers on the basis of that divine call. This does not mean that people will always recognize the calling and authority given to a person, as in the case of Paul. But if he relies on human credentials, then even in principle his authority is reduced to that level and narrowed to that range. On the other hand, a divine mandate authorizes a person to function in any type of situation to which God sends him.

It misses the point to think that the above makes it impossible to select, promote, or examine a person for the ministry – we have been talking about a different question. When it comes to this other issue, the New Testament includes several passages listing the public qualifications for the ministry (e.g. 1 Timothy 3:1-7), which we will not discuss at this time. In short, they pertain to a person's lifestyle, character, doctrine, and competence.

Turning from the personal to the doctrinal aspect of the passage, the controversy concerns how a person becomes righteous and acceptable before God. Must he follow the law of Moses, Jewish traditions, or submit to circumcision? The immediate issue is not even whether it is good to become circumcised, to follow the law of Moses, or to obey any law of God, but whether this is *the way* to become righteous in God's sight. This distinction is important in order to maintain the gospel of grace and at the same time exclude antinomianism. For if as a matter of principle it is against grace to keep God's law or to obey God's command, then grace would indeed lead to sin. But this is not the gospel that Paul preaches.

Again, the question is how a person becomes righteous, justified, and acceptable before God. The topic will receive ample attention in the body of the letter, so we need not spend

time on it here. What we have in this opening passage is a positive statement of the apostle's doctrine, doubtless given in anticipation of what follows, but that is also informative in itself.

Paul writes that Christ "gave himself for our sins." How is this relevant? Here is an example of how a positive statement about the gospel counteracts a false gospel, or how sound doctrine excludes its distortion. We are "rescued" because Christ "gave himself," and not because of our works or merits. To merely draw attention to this, that *this* is the gospel, should settle the issue. This is because, as Paul will soon point out, "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21). That is, the idea that "righteousness could be gained through the law" is antithetical to the sacrifice of Christ, so that they exclude each other. However, to be a Christian is to affirm that Christ "gave himself for our sins," and therefore, that "righteousness could be gained through the law" cannot be part of the Christian gospel, nor is anyone a Christian who affirms that righteousness is obtained this way.

This simple principle also speaks to today's controversies surrounding the doctrine of justification. In fact, the statement that Christ "gave himself for our sins to rescue us" should settle most questions and refute most heresies related to this doctrine. That is, any teaching that denies the necessity or the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, even if by implication, cannot be the Christian gospel. And as Paul declares in the next passage, no one who teaches or affirms such a teaching can be a Christian. A person cannot be a Christian and at the same time affirm or practice something that renders Christ's sacrifice unnecessary or insufficient.

Thus in this introductory passage, Paul encapsulates his answer to both the personal and the doctrinal aspects of the controversy. The rest of the letter contains specific arguments and explanations.

It is sometimes said that Paul is not a systematic thinker. It depends on what a person means by this as to whether or not we should accept the statement. If it means that his writings are occasional, so that he does not leave us with a body of doctrine presented *as a system*, then this is true in a sense, although we cannot accept even this without qualification. However, if it suggests that Paul is a purely pragmatic thinker, coming up with solutions as problems arise without an existing, extensive, organized, and self-consistent understanding of God's mind, or if it suggests that any part of Paul's writings contradicts or even appears to contradict another part, then the statement is false.

Although we may agree that Paul has written no systematic theology as such, and certainly not a textbook on the subject, in his mind he indeed affirms a system of theology that stands behind all of his sermons and letters. In fact, my exposition on Acts 17 points out that his speech on Mars Hill follows an outline that is almost identical to the arrangement of our typical systematic theology,<sup>1</sup> touching on the doctrines of revelation, theology proper, creation, providence, anthropology, ethics, christology, soteriology, and eschatology. This is not a coincidence, but it is because the topics logically and naturally lend themselves to

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<sup>1</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

such an arrangement in thinking and presentation.<sup>2</sup> In philosophical terms, the same outline would address the topics of epistemology, metaphysics, religion, biology, history, and ethics. Moreover, that speech exhibits a logical order in which one point follows from the previous one, and each one is related to all the others.

The necessary conclusion is that Paul is a systematic theologian, although this fact is obscured by the occasional nature of his letters. Or to put this in a much more accurate way, those who wish to find an excuse to assert their own theories and agendas exploit the occasional nature of these letters in order to deny the systematic structure and content of the apostle's thinking.

For a discourse to be occasional means that there is a context, and when a person addresses an audience who shares a common context, it is natural and often more efficient to assume the context and address only the problems and disagreements, rather than to begin "from scratch." Just because most of Paul's writings are occasional does not mean that he is primarily a pragmatic thinker or that he invents doctrines to match the solutions as the need arises. Instead, he explains and develops the relevant aspects of his system of theology, and then he applies them to the current situation. Not only does his occasional letters contain extensive doctrinal expositions, but behind everything that he writes is a complete theological system. There are strong indications of this in our passage, even though it is only an introduction to a letter.

Several times Paul acknowledges God and his divine fatherhood. Then, he puts God the Father and Jesus Christ on the same level, and at the same time distinguishes the two. Although he does not mention the Holy Spirit, he acknowledges the Trinity elsewhere in his writings, and he is consistent with the doctrine here. He says that he is sent "not from men nor by man, *but* by Jesus Christ and God the Father," implying that Christ is more than a mere man, but on the level with God the Father, who has the right and power to send him forth as an apostle.

Redemption was accomplished "according to the will of our God," signifying that salvation is effected by the gracious purpose and providence of a sovereign God. By his will, Christ "gave himself for our sins." Here we find the ideas of sin, of punishment, and of vicarious sacrifice, or the doctrine of the atonement. Both the justice and mercy of God are embedded in the above. After Christ sacrificed himself, God "raised him from the dead," so that the resurrection is included here as well.

The work of Christ has "rescued us from the present evil age." The language refers not to a removal from something, but a deliverance from its power. Although Christians remain in this world after their conversion, they have been delivered from slavery to the power of sin. Here Paul makes ethical applications out of eschatological categories. He acknowledges a "two age" division between the present and the future, but the coming of Christ has ushered in the kingdom of God, so that the very powers of heaven reside in believers even now. An entire book could be devoted to this point alone. We may also see

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<sup>2</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*.



a contrast between the "present evil age" and the "for ever and ever" of God's glory and power.

Thus most of the loci of a complete systematic theology is either mentioned or assumed in these first five verses of the letter. It is true that one must bring with him some of the details from other parts of Scripture to fully perceive and appreciate these doctrinal assumptions. But the fact that the assumptions are here means that these doctrines are ingrained in the apostle's thinking, and that he stands on this foundation as he writes to the Galatians.

Like his other writings, the letter to the Galatians is an expression and application of this system of theology, so that it is adapted to the need at hand. However, when the common context is taken away, and when he has to present the Christian faith "from scratch," as in his speech on Mars Hill, then we see that Paul is indeed a systematic theologian, a systematic thinker. Again, there in Acts 17, where his audience is unfamiliar with the biblical doctrines and thought categories, he follows an arrangement that resembles our typical systematic theology outline.

Those scholars who regard Paul as merely a pragmatic thinker and not a systematic one err in examining the question from the wrong end. Whereas Paul in fact possesses an extensive and coherent system in his mind, and his letters contain his expression and application of this, these scholars examine his writings without considering the kind of mind that produced them. Just because a piece of writing is not a systematic theology does not mean that its author is not a systematic theologian or that he has no system of belief in his mind.

For example, although I have written a systematic theology and consider the subject *the* most important course of learning for a believer, I often write sermons, commentaries, position papers, and responses to questions and objections about the Christian faith, and almost none of them will read like a systematic theology, since they are occasional. But a system of theology is so ingrained in my mind that, whether consciously or unconsciously, everything that I speak or write is in fact an expression and application of this system.<sup>3</sup> And insofar as I am a consistent thinker, all of my writings should conform to this system. This is a key to interpreting a writer's materials. If you grasp a person's system of thought, you are more likely to correctly understand what he means when he applies it. In fact, in many cases, you should be able to predict what he will say on a subject.

The ideal is that every detail of a person's system conforms to that system of thought that is in Scripture. The honest and competent theologian will, of course, seek to resolve any anomaly in favor of what Scripture actually teaches, even if he must discard his previous beliefs to do this. To the extent that the system of theology in his mind is derived from and corresponds to that which is taught in Scripture, this person's thinking is synchronized with the mind of Christ, and he is qualified to address the issues and questions that he faces as a believer and as a minister.

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<sup>3</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, The Author of Sin, and Captive to Reason*.

Paul leaves us an example to follow if we were to become mature thinkers. That is, we must obtain a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the system of thought that is revealed in Scripture, and formulate the various doctrines in our minds in a way that exhibits perfect harmony, excluding all traces of contradictions and paradoxes. Then, we must learn to fluidly apply this system in our daily conversations, as we preach the gospel, as we debate unbelievers and answer heretics, counsel fellow Christians, resolve ethical questions, and so on.

Like Paul, when we are applying this system of thought, there is no need to always refer to it in a prescribed arrangement, but what we speak or write should demonstrate a logical interplay of the biblical doctrines, deftly blending them together to produce an answer as if it comes straight from the mind of Christ to address the situation at hand. Then, of course, if the situation demands that we summarize the entire Christian faith in a logical order and without being confined to a narrow context, we should be able to do that as well.

## **GALATIANS 1:6-10**

**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!**

**Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

Some people compare reading an occasional letter to listening in to one side of a conversation that is already in progress. We are not privy to all that has occurred and all that has been said up to this point in the controversy, and even now we are hearing only from Paul, and not from the Judaizers or the Galatians.

This is why it is at times difficult to attain a precise understanding of some passages, although the problem is often exaggerated. The level of difficulty hinges on the level of clarity with which the person expresses himself. This includes his language and the amount of information that he includes on his side of the conversation.

Imagine if the only word we hear from a person on one side of the conversation is "Yes." Since we do not know the question or even the topic of the conversation, it is impossible for us to infer any useful information from this word alone. In this case, our lack of access to the other side cripples our understanding of the conversation.

But what if the person says, "Yes, I will meet you at the church parking lot tomorrow morning to discuss the details." This does not only tell us that the person will meet someone at the church parking lot tomorrow morning, but it also tells us something about the question to which this statement serves as a response. The two will meet to discuss "the details" about something that is most likely related to the topic of the current conversation. And if we could hear more from this person, even if only his side of the conversation, we will probably also discover the topic, and what kind of details about this topic that they plan to discuss the next day.

In this case, having access to only one side of the conversation does not cripple our understanding. In fact, we could obtain more information by hearing one side of the conversation from someone who speaks clearly and fully than we could by hearing both sides of a conversation in which the people involved do not speak clearly and fully.

Often, even if we cannot infer everything about the original context, we can still derive all that we need to know from one side of the conversation. For example, we read in Paul's letter to the Romans, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18). Without knowing whether this is written as a response to a question, objection, or argument, and without knowing what preceded the statement that warrants the "therefore," we can derive from this the universal truth that "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

Of course, the context can significantly alter the precise meaning and application of the statement, but we have the entire letter to the Romans to tell us that, as well as the entire Pauline corpus, the entire New Testament, as well as the entire Old Testament. Therefore, even though we have access to only one side of the conversation, nothing important to truth is lost here. Consider this point in relation to the doctrine of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

Paul mentions the reason for his letter right away. At this point we are not provided with details about the problem, but the Galatians know what Paul has in mind. He begins by referring to the issue in general terms, describing the problem and noting its consequences. "Some people" are trying to "pervert the gospel," and to convince the Galatians to affirm "another gospel." We will be able to infer from the rest of the letter the nature of the doctrinal perversion and this other "gospel" – what Paul says in this passage belongs to that context, but there are some points here that demand universal application even apart from it.

Paul does not begin the body of his letter in the usual manner. He does not express gratitude to God for anything good that he has wrought in the readers, nor does he offer prayer so that God would enable them to make further progress. He does not commend his readers for anything that they have performed, believed, or maintained. This departure from the usual form accentuates the urgency and agitation that would characterize the rest of the letter.

Why is there this sense of urgency and agitation? It is because the Galatians are "turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all." In other words, they are turning away from the message that Paul preached to them to another that represents itself as the gospel. But this different message is not the gospel at all, and as this same passage points out, there is really no gospel other than the one that Paul preached to them.

Paul stresses the exclusivity of the gospel from several angles. He writes that if "we" (including Paul himself), "an angel," or "anybody" should preach a different message to them, then let that person be "eternally condemned." The variation on the message is described in two ways: "other than the one we preached to you" and "other than what you accepted."

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<sup>4</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*.

That is, if anybody at all – including any apostle or any angel – preaches a message other than the one Paul preached to them, or to say the same thing, other than the one the Galatians first received, then that message is a false gospel, and may that messenger be eternally condemned. There is no room for any deviation, any modification, any modernization, or any "improvement" to the original gospel message. There is no room for flexibility in its content. To say this in a positive way, this original message is accurate, precise, complete, and enduring, so that anything different from it is false doctrine.

It is true that the present controversy has to do with justification by faith, but the above must not be limited to this area in its application. This is because of the universal and comprehensive manner in which Paul asserts this principle of exclusivity. Paul preached the true gospel to the Galatians, and there is only one true gospel. Therefore, any deviation constitutes false doctrine.

All the elements in this exclusive path to salvation is fixed. A person cannot, without eternal consequence to his own soul, remove anything in the Christian system of doctrine that destroys the coherence of the gospel message. For example, one cannot make sense of justification by faith if the biblical teaching on sin is denied, rendering Christ's vicarious sacrifice and imputed righteousness unnecessary in the first place. Thus, in affirming the gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians, one must affirm what this message says about God, Christ, sin, faith, and so on.

Paul equates turning away from the message about Christ to turning away from the person of God, that is, "the one who called you by the grace of Christ."<sup>5</sup> Because the Christian message is God's revelation about himself and his way of salvation, to reject, abandon, or fail to accept the Christian message, therefore, is to reject, abandon, or fail to accept God himself. This means that it is impossible for a person to reject Christianity and at the same time find God or salvation. It is impossible for a person to find his way to God or salvation through any other "gospel," religion, or philosophy. It is also impossible for anyone to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ by believing some other message or following some other system of thought. If the content of a religion or philosophy is empty of or different from the message that Paul preached, then this message cannot lead anyone to God, to Christ, or to salvation.

Any person who preaches a message other than the one Paul first delivered to the Galatians, and other than the one they accepted, is "eternally condemned." The word is *anathema*, or "accursed," but the NIV offers the correct translation in terms of its meaning. Although Paul directs the twice-spoken anathema toward someone who preaches anything different (v. 8-9), the threat of eternal damnation applies equally to anyone who accepts such a message. This is because there is really no other gospel, and what the Galatians are now turning to "is really no gospel at all."

Since the purpose of a gospel is salvation (else Paul preaches in vain), since the gospel of justification by faith in Christ is necessary for salvation (else Christ died in vain), and since

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<sup>5</sup> "The one who called" refers to God, and not to the apostle himself. For example, see 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, and 2 Timothy 1:8-9.

anyone who preaches something different is not preaching the true gospel, it follows that anyone who believes something different fails to believe in any gospel and therefore receives eternal damnation just as readily as someone who preaches something different.

Thus there are at least three points here that combine to narrow the way of salvation to one. First, turning to another "gospel" is the same as turning away from God. Second, there is in fact no other gospel. Third, anyone who preaches a different message is condemned. And since this person preaches a message that is "really no gospel at all," those who believe him in fact believe in "no gospel," and they are also condemned. The passage leaves no room for distortions, alternatives, or lenient interpretations.

Paul is emphatic as to the precise and exclusive nature of the gospel, and he is eager to declare the consequence for deviating from it. It is in the same spirit that we paraphrase the point that he tries to get across: "If you preach or believe anything other than the biblical gospel, and if you preach or believe anything other than the Christian faith as defined and expounded by the New Testament apostles, God will send you to suffer forever in hell."

This does not mean that even minor errors and small disagreements lead to damnation, but it means that many errors are not minor and many disagreements are not small. Even if we restrict Paul's anathema to the letter's context of justification by faith in Christ, and thus also all the other doctrines that are required to maintain its coherence, this passage is sufficient to condemn all non-Christian religions and philosophies – all non-Christian ways of thinking – as paths to everlasting destruction in hell. These must include Catholicism, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, agnosticism, and so on, since they both directly contradict the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone and other doctrines that are required to maintain its coherence.

We must not leave out heretical doctrines that claim to come under the Christian faith or to offer a superior but different interpretation of the gospel. For example, the so-called New Perspective on Paul not only perverts the gospel of Christ, but it does so in a way that is especially relevant to our passage, striking at the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. Thus we must declare with Paul that it is "really no gospel at all," and insist on the consequence that necessarily follows from this fact – because it is "no gospel," it can bring no salvation.

Just as Paul takes great pains to make his point on this clear, so we say it again: If a person is anything other than a Christian, if he affirms anything other than the biblical doctrines and the gospel of Jesus Christ, as defined and expounded by the New Testament, then God will certainly cast this person into hell, where he will suffer extreme torment forever.

Just as true Christianity has never gained wide acceptance – it separates the saved and the unsaved – the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, since *it is* Christianity, has never gained wide acceptance. And just as Paul had to combat oppositions against this doctrine *in churches* that called themselves Christian, this is a present danger and reality in many of our congregations today, where they preach and accept a message that is "really no

gospel at all." But if there is no gospel there, then there is no salvation there, and we have no right to call them churches of God when they are the synagogues of Satan.

Speaking like this is sure to attract criticism, even from those who call themselves believers. How could Paul speak in such absolute, inflexible, and threatening terms? But he writes in verse 10, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."

It is possible that the Judaizers have been describing Paul as one who accommodates his message to please his listeners. He would preach circumcision to the Jews, but exempt the Gentiles from this requirement. This might be why he later writes, "Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished" (Galatians 5:11).

But verse 10 makes good sense in our passage even if it is not a response to the Judaizers' misrepresentation. Paul has just pronounced the curse of damnation against those who *preach* anything different from what he first preached to the Galatians, a message whose content we will soon learn more about, since he would proceed to reinforce it in the rest of the letter. And as we noted, by implication the curse also applies to those who *believe* anything different than what he preached. In issuing this curse, Paul has denounced the spiritual standing of every person who disagrees with him on the issue at hand. It is easy to imagine how this might offend.

What enables Paul to speak with such authority and boldness, and – since the situation warrants it – with sharp words, curses, and threats, is the mentality that he is a servant of Christ and not a pleaser of men. The two are mutually exclusive: "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." A pleaser of men is not a servant of Christ, and it follows that a servant of Christ cannot be a pleaser of men at the same time. Those who serve Christ do not please men; those who please men do not serve Christ.

Of course, regenerate men are pleased to hear the truth, but the emphasis here is on the apostle's motive. He carries out Christ's orders regardless of what men might think about him or do to him. He does not compromise the content of his message to entice his listeners, and he does not soften his approach to appease them. This mentality is the key to faithful ministry and spiritual boldness. His acute awareness that he is a servant of Christ makes God the central reference point for all his thoughts and motives. His only concern is to speak and perform that which pleases and honors God.

It is true that we are, in a sense, the servants of men, but they are not our masters. There is no paradox or contradiction here. Christ is our master, and the only reason we serve other people is because he commands us to do so. In a humanistic or man-centered worldview, it is often believed that there is an inherent obligation or value in helping our fellow human beings. This tendency affects many Christians, but since it does not come from and cannot be harmonized with the God-centered ethic of Scripture, the resulting worldview is incoherent and non-Christian.

On the other hand, in a God-centered ethic, God is the only true master, and all of our beliefs, values, and actions proceed with his revelation as the reference point. Thus we serve men not because they are our masters, but because God is our master, and he has told us to serve men. It also follows that we will only serve men only in the manner and to the extent prescribed by God's revelation.

In a God-centered worldview, we would as soon kill them as be killed for them – it all depends on what God commands. Any Christian who is shocked or unnerved by this statement does not truly regard God as his master, and he is mystified and offended by someone who does.<sup>6</sup> In his heart he has placed above God a non-biblical standard by which he approves or disapproves of who God is, what he does, and what he commands.<sup>7</sup> He is like someone who regards a religion as false because it commands acts of violence. This reverses the proper order of reasoning. If a religion is true, then the violence that it commands is God's revelation. It stands as a moral imperative, and it would be immoral to disapprove of it or to disobey it. Thus, that a religion commands violence does not make it false; rather, that a religion is false makes the violence that it commands without authority.

Likewise, we serve men not because of who they are or because there is an inherent moral obligation, but we do it because of who God is, what he has revealed to us about himself and about men, and what he has commanded us to do. Therefore, in principle we serve Christ alone. We serve men only because this is what he has commanded. Thus we are their servants not in an absolute sense, but only relative to the divine commands. We do good to them under Christ's directions, and as his servants.

This also means that it is not up to men to dictate to us the terms of our service. We serve them only in the manner and to the extent that Scripture commands us. A Christian who truly believes this is thus free from the fear of men. By "men" here, of course, we include believers as well, for a Christian is often called to serve other Christians, and his greatest enemies and persecutors will frequently consist of those who profess the faith. But if we are the servants of Christ, then we will be unafraid of criticisms, attacks, and pressures that come from mere men. Our only focus is on doing that which Christ has commanded us.

This passage informs us of Paul's attitude as he writes the letter to the Galatians, but it provides a basis for much more. Because Scripture also teaches all Christians to be servants

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<sup>6</sup> This is more than an illustration, but it has applications in Christian practice. For example, Scripture commands corporal punishment for disobedient children and the death penalty for some criminals. There are those who judge the Christian revelation as false or defective because of these commands, but this reverses the proper order of reasoning, and begs the question. Rather, if the Christian Scripture is a revelation from God, then these commands are good, moral, and necessary. It would be sinful to disapprove of, disagree with, or disobey them. Nevertheless, the principle is not bound to these particular applications. If a person approves of God's command to execute a murderer not because it is God's command, but only because he himself thinks that this is what a murderer deserves, then he is still making himself God's judge. The principle is what is important here – that is, what God commands is good and moral by definition, even if it entails violence, or anything that is opposed by a foreign standard.

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, it begs the question for an unbeliever to judge God's revelation by a standard foreign to that revelation. He already assumes that what is judged is not God's revelation, since God's revelation would be the highest standard by which anything could be judged. Thus the revelation and the standard that is foreign to it must be established or refuted in some other manner before one could judge the other.



of Christ, and to fear God and not men, we must personalize what we derive from the passage about Paul's thinking and behavior. Anyone who is able to do this – and to the extent that he is consistent in it – has been liberated from the fear of men to enter a life of faithful and efficient Christian ministry. An effective exposition of Galatians should model and impart this to believers.

I am a servant, a slave of Christ. Insofar as I believe this truth, I will have no selfish agendas and aspirations. Since self-preservation and self-promotion are not the motives, fears of failure, danger, and opposition have no place of entry. A servant conducts business for his master, according to his command, in his name, and by his authority. Therefore, he does not measure what is before him against his own resources, but against his master's resources.

Since my master's authority is complete and absolute, then so is my confidence as I carry out the mission that he has given me. I do not need to think that I am better than someone in myself in order to instruct him, correct him, reprimand him, and when appropriate, to pronounce the curse of damnation upon him. And it is precisely because I am a servant of Christ that I am immune to those who question my standing as a servant of Christ. No matter how legitimate a ministry, it will always be challenged by those who call themselves believers, as in the case of Paul. But I live to please Christ, not them. I live for his approval, not theirs.

Because Paul is bold, harsh, and urgent in dealing with the present situation, I have every right and reason to be as bold, harsh, and urgent in a similar set of circumstances. Whether we are confronting the unbelief of non-Christians, or professing Christians who oppose us, I have the authority to speak plainly and bluntly. In fact, when confronting heretics that attempt to pervert the core of the gospel, it is nothing less than spiritual treason to put on an attitude of academic detachment that is characteristic of the non-Christian notion of intellectual respectability.

A minister often faces more than verbal criticisms from his critics. Sometimes there is much political (both civil and ecclesiastical), social, and financial pressure exerted against him. And this will often come in the most vicious and underhanded manner from those who call themselves believers. I am aware of this each time I say something that is disagreeable to the critics.

Sometimes there are complaints from individuals of little significance. Sometimes there are political backlashes from those who seem to have some clout. And often the attacks consist of mob pressure rather than logical argument. I am aware of the possible consequences, so that I make attempts to be wise as a serpent but harmless as a dove, not being foolhardy lest I put God's grace to the test. On the other hand, I am also aware that because my ministry is commissioned by God, it is also indestructible. (And if God wishes to destroy it, why would I want to save it?) Just as the key to an invincible defense of the faith is complete dependence on the wisdom of God, the key to an indestructible ministry is complete dependence on the power of God.

This attitude is most frustrating to those who persecute a ministry, and to those who oppose the work of God, since here is a person that they cannot intimidate or manipulate, or harm and hinder in any way that matters. What can they do to me? They can criticize. If what I teach is false, then they are the least of my problems. But if what I teach is correct, then God himself will vindicate it in the hearts of men, and in whom he has chosen to reveal the truth, working above and beyond my effort to promote and defend it. Thus I can perform the ministry on my terms, and not have them dictated to me by the adversaries, or by the latest and strongest pressure.

What can they do? They can employ sophistical arguments, but they cannot kill God's word. They can wield ecclesiastical powers, but they cannot kill God's work. They could kill me, but if I have learned to take up the cross daily, then in my mind it has already happened – I have already died, the fear and the sting of death have been taken away. Since this ministry has been commissioned by Christ, there is nothing that anyone can do to damage it, whether Christian or non-Christian. I rest in his calling and his providence. And since this ministry is indeed of God, then those who seek to destroy it are not fighting against me, but God. Yet they are mere tools in the hands of God, who works all things for his glory and for my good, so that I may accomplish all that he has commanded me to perform.

## **GALATIANS 1:11-12**

**I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**

The Judaizers' strategy for subverting the gospel seems to include an attack on Paul's authority and credibility. One possible accusation is that Paul in fact preaches circumcision among the Jews, but exempts the Gentiles from this requirement in order to appease them and gather disciples (see 1:10 and 5:11). Along with this, the Judaizers probably claim to represent Jerusalem, and that Paul himself received his understanding of the gospel from there, so that his theology and ministry are derivative of and subordinate to the mother church. Therefore, Paul begins his reply by asserting the divine origin and the independence of his message. That is, he denies human invention in the content of his preaching, and denies human instruction as the method of his learning.

He writes, "I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ," or literally, "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (ESV, NASB). This can refer to Christ as the content of what is revealed or to Christ as the revealer of the content of the gospel. The grammar permits both meanings, and both are true in Paul's life.

The first possibility is often favored because several verses later, he says, "God...was pleased to reveal his Son in me." This would make the statement an expansion and explanation of what is meant by "through a revelation of Jesus Christ." So God is the revealer, and Christ is the content of God's revelation to Paul. Indeed, the Father is the one who makes known the person of Christ and the veracity of the gospel to those whom he has chosen to save (Matthew 16:17; John 6:44). However, it is not clear that verses 15-16 are related in such a manner to verse 12, or that they can restrict verse 12 to this meaning, so that "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" is equated with "to reveal his Son in me." The verses would remain true and meaningful, and consistent with one another, even if these phrases are not equated in this way.

If the second meaning is intended, so that Christ is the revealer, then Paul may have in mind the incident in Acts 9, when Christ appeared to him, converted him, and commissioned him to preach the gospel. We must realize that biblical narratives are summaries, so that Acts 9 records only those portions of the encounter that are relevant to the context – the full conversation between Christ and Paul could have been much more extensive. We know this because when Paul later relates the same experience in Acts 26, Christ's commission to him is much more descriptive and theologically rich. It even includes the idea that God's people are "sanctified *by faith*" in Christ (v. 15-18), a point that has much to do with Galatians. Doubtless these additional details are included because they are relevant to the context of Acts 26 and to what Paul is communicating to King Agrippa.

In addition, even if Paul is referring to only one instance of revelation, it will help us to better appreciate the development of his theology and ministry by noting that he continues to receive many visions and revelations throughout his life. In fact, Paul's role is partly defined in such a manner. Ananias said to him, "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth" (Acts 22:14). This part of what Ananias said to Paul is not included in Acts 9, and we do not find out about it until Acts 22, again illustrating that biblical narratives and dialogues are almost always abbreviated, relating only those portions that are relevant to the immediate context and purpose.

Paul has been chosen to see Christ and to hear from him. Visions and revelations are thus not incidental to his calling, but are explicitly and prominently specified in his "job description," so to speak. Indeed, we see that the vision in Acts 9 is just the first of numerous subsequent ones. Acts 18:9 says, "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision," and gave him encouragement and instruction. Keep in mind that this could be an abbreviated description of a much longer conversation. In Acts 22:17-22, Paul relates a conversation that he had with Christ while he was praying at the temple. The passage takes less than a minute to read, but it could refer to a very lengthy session. Acts 23:11 says, "The following night the Lord stood near Paul" and gave him encouragement and direction. Again, this is only one verse in the Bible, but the nature of biblical narratives requires us to think that it could have lasted much longer than the time that it takes to read about it.

Paul's experiences were not limited to visions and revelations from Christ. In Acts 16:9-10, he receives a vision in which a man begged him to visit Macedonia. In Acts 27:23-24, he says that an angel appeared to him and gave him assurance about his journey. Then, in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6, he relates an experience in which he was "caught up to the third heaven...to paradise," where "he heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."

So here is what we can gather about this aspect of Paul's spiritual life. First, he was explicitly called to see and hear the resurrected Christ. Second, the Bible records numerous instances of him seeing and hearing Christ. Third, it is certain that at least some of these records are greatly abbreviated accounts of the actual events. Fourth, besides visions of Christ, Paul experienced other kinds of visions and revelations numerous times, including a visit to heaven. Fifth, he states that he tends to refrain from relating these experiences "so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say" (2 Corinthians 12:6). Sixth, in light of what we have established so far, it is reasonable to assume that the Bible records only a small fraction of the total number of Paul's visions. Finally, and this also reinforces the previous point, while discussing the matter of visions, he describes his own life as one characterized by "surpassingly great revelations," the frequency and magnitude of which were such that he was given a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from becoming conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Putting all of this together, it would be almost an understatement to say that Paul was granted one of the most spectacular prophetic ministries in biblical history. In fact, it is possible that he was unsurpassed by anyone in the quantity, length, and depth of his visions

and revelations, and in his direct encounters with the Lord. It is possible, and very probable, that the time that Christ spent with Paul in visions could add up to many hours. Given what we have established above, this conclusion is far from a mere speculation.

Christ was very fond of teaching people prior to his crucifixion. And after his resurrection, he did not appear to his disciples only several seconds or several minutes at a time, but he spent hours and hours with them, teaching them, even eating with them. On the road to Emmaus, he walked along with two disciples and "explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The way this event is described seems to indicate that it lasted for a number of hours. Again, given what we have established about Paul's experiences, it is not far-fetched to think that Christ taught this apostle in a similar manner. As we noted, even in his initial appearance to Paul, he told him that God's people are "sanctified *by faith*" (Acts 26:18).

Some might find it strange that Christ would dedicate an extraordinary amount of time to speak to someone in visions after his ascension, but nothing in Scripture rules this out. Nevertheless, perhaps this is why Paul writes, "...and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Besides, later he appeared to the apostle John and dictated seven letters to him. Surely that must have taken more than several minutes. In any case, the amount of time spent is not the crucial factor, but it is the amount of information conveyed. Some other mode of communication could have been used so that a large amount of information was passed from one to the other in an instant.

And this is what we wish to emphasize with Paul's visions and revelations – regardless of their duration, they were so extensive in content that he must be considered nothing less than a direct and personal disciple of the Lord. Moreover, as an apostle, what he did not receive by visions from the Lord, he understood by inspiration from the Spirit. Thus his gospel is not "something that man made up." And in light of this, whatever he heard from man previous to his conversion, his theological development certainly did not depend on any man.

This, by the way, counters the notion that Paul was the real founder of Christianity, and that he preached a different religion than what Christ preached. No, Paul was directly taught and trained by Christ. He preached the same message that Christ preached, and the message that Christ told him to preach. In connection with the previous passage (1:6-10), this reinforces the fact that to turn away from the gospel that Paul preached is to turn away from the God who established and revealed it. To reject the message is to reject the person.

Here, then, is a controlling principle for sound theology. Any interpretation of Scripture that supposes a merely human origin for Paul's message is a denial of reality. Any interpretation of Scripture that generates disagreement between Christ and Paul must be in error. And any interpretation of Scripture that assumes a lower authority for the words of Paul as compared to the words of Christ must also be false. This, of course, does not suggest that Paul in himself was equal with Christ, but that Paul was so submitted, taught, and trained by Christ and inspired by the Spirit that his words came from Christ, and are equivalent to the words of Christ.

There are some professing believers who claim to affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture, but then fail to acknowledge this point, although it necessarily follows from the doctrine. Occasionally, a Christian might hesitate to accept or even challenge portions of the New Testament because, after all, they are the words of Paul and not of Christ. This is often used to resist Paul's teachings regarding sin, judgment, the role of women in marriage and ministry, among others. But this is a slap in God's face. Paul was Christ's authorized and inspired messenger. To reject him is to reject the one who sent him.

## **GALATIANS 1:13-24**

**For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.**

**Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.**

This passage continues what Paul started in verses 11-12, and that is to demonstrate the independence of his message and ministry from human influence and authority. He does this by telling the story about his conversion and development. As noted, this is very likely his response to the accusations and misrepresentations of the Judaizers, and from what he says in the response, we can infer something about the accusations and misrepresentations that it answers.

Paul asserts the divine origin of his message and ministry, and his independence from human influence and authority. We infer from this that the Judaizers claim the opposite about him in their accusations and misrepresentations. And then, since Paul proceeds to give a history of his conversion and ministry, with emphasis on his independence from the Jerusalem church and its leaders, we infer that this also has to do with what the Judaizers have been saying in their attempts to undermine him.

Nevertheless, Paul's side of this interaction is rich enough in content that it is intelligible and meaningful to us even without a definite knowledge about the nature of these accusations and misrepresentations. Moreover, since we are striving for concision, and since we would like to avoid undue speculations, in what follows we will focus on what Paul actually says instead of what he is supposed to be defending himself against by what he says.

His story begins at the period before his conversion to the Christian faith. He calls his previous way of life "Judaism." Thus he makes a sharp distinction between Judaism and Christianity. These are not two expressions of one religion, and Christianity is not a sect of Judaism, but they are two different religions altogether. In fact, Judaism is not even the faith of the Old Testament. The religion of the Old Testament prescribes the law of Moses,

but that has never been the way to salvation. Rather, the gospel that demands faith in the future Messiah has been preached since the very beginning, even since the fall of Adam (Genesis 3:15). And since that time the prophets have preached the gospel of the future Christ with increasing insight (1 Peter 1:10-12).<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Judaism is a faith that is "zealous for the traditions" of the elders. Many of these traditions have been imposed upon the Old Testament, not in order to obey it, but in order to disobey it while appearing to obey it.<sup>9</sup> Since Judaism is not Christianity, and since Judaism does not obey even the Old Testament, the necessary conclusion is that no adherent of Judaism can receive salvation. Judaism has evolved since that time, but not for the better, and there is still no salvation in it.

Many Christians affirm all the premises that inevitably lead to this conclusion, but they will not state the conclusion. This is because they fear men rather than God. But "if I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." So we say, all believers of Judaism will be condemned to hell. I wonder how anyone who refuses to affirm this can even be a Christian. Logically speaking, he cannot, since by refusing the negative implication of the gospel, he has logically repudiated its positive claims. This is the necessary implication of the gospel, but rather than to offend, some prefer to say that Christ died for nothing (2:21).

Paul was "advancing in Judaism" and was "extremely zealous" in it. Other portions of the New Testament provide us with additional information on his credentials and accomplishments in this religion. For example, he writes in Philippians 3:4-6, "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (also see Acts 22:3-5, 26:4-11). No one can say that he turned away from Judaism because he was ignorant of it or failing in it.

Paul's position was clear. He was established in Judaism, and was determined to destroy Christianity. He was not "on the fence" in any way. When he was converted, he was not inquiring from any of the apostles or disciples about the way of salvation. In fact, he was fiercely charging toward the opposite direction, heading to Damascus with letters from the high priest to arrest the Christians that he may find there.

Thus in verses 15-16, he describes his conversion as a work of God and not a work of man. He says he was converted because "God... was pleased to reveal his Son in me." Consistent with the context and his purpose, man is wholly excluded, and no man receives any credit for his sudden and dramatic change. He had heard the testimony of Christians, but he was not convinced and rather persecuted them because of it.

Further, men did not set him apart by some process of consecration or ordination, but he says it was God "who set me apart from birth." Of course, every legitimate ministry is

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<sup>8</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on First Peter*.

<sup>9</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.



divinely ordained, predetermined by God before the creation of the world. But Paul here echoes the prophetic consciousness of one like Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:5), and again directs attention to his conversion and ministry as one foreordained and accomplished by divine will, rather than by human initiation and discipleship.

He writes that "God...called me by his grace." He was not chosen because of his works or merits, and certainly not because of his dedication to Judaism, which "grace" caused him to leave behind. By telling his story, Paul provides an ingenious indirect argument against the false gospel. Probably none of the Judaizers could match what Paul had attained in Judaism, and the Gentile Galatians are at an even greater disadvantage. But what the Judaizers are preaching and what the Galatians are turning to – that which they covet and strive for – is precisely what Paul had to be rescued from by the grace of God.

By turning to the message of the Judaizers, the Galatians are not finding a solution better than what Paul gave them – there is nothing better – but they are taking on a problem greater than any of them could bear. If adherence to Jewish laws and traditions is the answer, then Paul already had it before his conversion to the Christian faith, but he speaks of it as bondage and damnation. He was charging much more fiercely in the direction that the Galatians are now heading, and he tells them that there is no salvation there. He pointed them toward the right way when he first preached to them.

He says that God revealed Christ to him "so that I might preach him among the Gentiles," or to the various nations and peoples. This is not the whole of Christ's commission to Paul (see Acts 9:15), but it is a major part of it, and the part that is most relevant to his readers and the thrust of this letter. Later he will emphasize God's promise to Abraham, that through him "All nations will be blessed" (3:8, also 3:14). This provides a context that accentuates the significance of his commission, and assuming that he also perceives the connection, he understands his ministry as God's fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. And it in turn emphasizes once more the legitimacy and authority of the ministry against the Judaizers.

As Paul proceeds to describe the period after his conversion, he continues to emphasize his independence from human influence and authority, and especially his independence from Jerusalem. Thus he writes, "I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was." Instead, he "went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus."

It is often assumed that for about three years (v. 18), he spent much time in isolation in order to think through his new understanding of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of all that the prophets have spoken about. It is during this time that his theology developed and matured, providing a foundation for the insights and revelations that would find expression in this letters.

This is possible, and he indeed acknowledges a connection between reflection and illumination (2 Timothy 2:7). However, there is no definite evidence to suggest that he spent these three years mainly in isolation and for the purpose of theological reflection. In

fact, although it is certain that he continued to increase in his understanding of the faith, it is said that he immediately began to preach the gospel (Acts 9:20). And if anything, we should assume that he went into Arabia at least partly, if not mainly, to spread the gospel as well.

In our context, the main point is that his understanding of the faith and his preaching of the gospel did not begin under the influence and authority of Jerusalem. Rather, right away he started to preach that "Jesus is the Son of God," and "proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:20, 22). And he has been consistent in preaching this message to both Jews and Gentiles since his conversion (Galatians 1:16).

When he finally went up to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (v. 18), he already had an established theology and ministry, developed apart from human influence and authority, and apart from Jerusalem and the other apostles. Although he stayed with Peter for fifteen days, it was only "to get acquainted." He was not there to receive credentials from him, or in any way to gain his approval or authorization.

It is hard to imagine that they talked only about the weather during these fifteen days, for doubtless there was much discussion concerning Christ, their revelations, and ministry activities and directions. Peter very likely shared with Paul a number of details about the earthly ministry of Christ that the latter did not know. But no one should be surprised if Paul in turn gave Peter several theological pointers. And he was by no means behind Peter in terms of visions and revelations as well. In any case, there is no need to speculate – the point is that they met as equals.

Besides Peter, Paul says, he saw none of the other apostles, James excepted. This was "the Lord's brother," and not James the son of Zebedee. Although James would become one of the "pillars" (2:9) in Jerusalem, he did not believe before the resurrection of Christ. So whether Paul includes this James as one of the "other apostles," he was not one of the twelve.

This seems to be a highly significant point in his reply against the Judaizers' accusations and misrepresentations, since he deems it appropriate to invoke the name of God to assure his readers of the truth of what he is telling them (v. 20) – that is, that he only met Peter and James, and only for the purpose of getting acquainted. This piece of information very likely contradicts the account promoted by the Judaizers, and strikes at one of the key claims that they made about Paul and his relationship to the Jerusalem church and the twelve apostles.

Verse 21 states that he then "went to Syria and Cilicia." Perhaps this is to eliminate any suspicion that he had met up with other Jerusalem believers elsewhere. So he says that he was "personally unknown to the churches of Judea," only that they had heard a report about his conversion and ministry, and that they praised God because of him.

## **GALATIANS 2:1-10**

**Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.**

**As for those who seemed to be important – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance – those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.**

Things get really interesting with this passage. From it we can derive much about ecclesiastical politics in relation to the defense of the gospel. For this reason, it ought to receive ample attention in a program of ministry training. The purpose of this commentary prevents us from pointing out many of the details worthy of discussion on this subject. The passage presents a number of interpretive difficulties in itself, and to push any one of the alternatives very far would take us beyond exposition into speculation. The main points are clear as usual, and what follows will ensure that we grasp them, if nothing else.

Paul has been narrating an account of his life that very likely counters the Judaizers' accusations and misrepresentations. In the previous passage (1:13-24), he recalled his condition prior to conversion and how God consecrated and transformed him, having revealed Christ to him and called him to preach the gospel. By the time he met the apostles, his theology and ministry were already established, so that as far as anything that has to do with this controversy is concerned, he was directly called by God and taught by Christ, and he owed nothing to Jerusalem. Paul continues his story and sets the record straight. Building on the previous verses, he describes another visit to Jerusalem. While maintaining his independence, he now shows that the other apostles are in agreement with him.

Verse 1 states that he was accompanied by Barnabas and Titus on this visit. Acts does not mention Titus at all, but it mentions two visits that Paul undertook with Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-4). The first was to bring relief for the famine predicted by Agabus, and the

second was the council at Jerusalem. It is assumed that this one in Galatians is to be identified with either one or the other. While many conclude that the event overlaps with the Jerusalem council, this is not without its difficulties, so that there are those who favor the alternative.<sup>10</sup>

If Galatians 1:18 corresponds to Acts 9:26-27, and if Galatians 2:1 describes the very next visit, then it would be referring to the one in Acts 11. However, the word "again" does not require this conclusion, but could refer to a third or fourth visit since Paul's conversion, or to the second one that is of any relevance to the controversy. That is, if the visit in Galatians 2 overlaps with the council of Acts 15, then the visit in Acts 11 has been omitted because it is considered irrelevant in this context. The answer somewhat affects a precise understanding of our passage, and also 2:11-14, but Paul's intent is clear enough so that uncertainty on this issue does not paralyze exposition.

The visit occurred fourteen years later. By now it was certainly too late for anyone to claim that Paul owed his theology and ministry to any human influence or authority, since they were even more established and inflexible. He had long become a major force for the Christian movement in his own right, that is, by the grace of God at work through him. The only thing that remained for the apostles to do was to either accept or reject his theology and ministry.

Barnabas, of course, was a major figure among the Jewish Christians. He was originally Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, and was renamed by the apostles (Acts 4:36). Later, when the disciples were suspicious of Paul's conversion, he was the one who broke the barrier for Paul and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). The two remained partners in ministry among the Gentiles until they separated because of a dispute over Mark, who had deserted them earlier (Acts 15:36-41).

"Son of Encouragement" that he was (Acts 4:36), he treated Mark out of the same disposition that moved him to reach out to Paul in the first place, and this later proved to be a worthwhile investment (Colossians 4:10-11), as Mark became "helpful" even to Paul in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11), and wrote one of the Gospels. In any case, it was natural and beneficial that Barnabas and Paul traveled together here in Galatians 2. To have Barnabas on his side, and working not only together with him but also with the Greek convert Titus, could only have helped Paul's credibility before Jerusalem.

Titus had a greater significance than a superficial reading of verses 3-5 might detect. Paul was to set forth his gospel before Jerusalem, so he knew that his ministry would come under scrutiny. He realized that many Jews denied that God would bless any group of people other than the natural descendents of Abraham, so that if the Gentiles were to receive salvation, the least that they could do was to undergo circumcision, to come under the law, and thus to identify themselves with the Jewish people. And no doubt he was aware that even some of those who claimed to be Christians thought this way.

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 9-28, and 86.

Therefore, Paul must have known that if he was going to bring along a Gentile Christian as a test case or to demonstrate the fruit of his ministry, he had better bring the best specimen. In fact, even if he did not intend to make a test case out of him, if he was going to bring a Gentile Christian at all, he still had to bring the best. At stake was nothing less than the effectiveness of the past and future efforts of his ministry (v. 2). Of course, as it turned out, Titus did become a test case for Paul's work among the Gentiles (v. 3-5). He embodied the truth, power, and success of Paul's message and ministry; he was a walking contradiction to the Judaizers' doctrine.

So because they were to face Jewish Christians, many of whom harbored a prejudice against the Gentiles that was against the gospel, we assume that Paul brought the very best Gentile Christian with him when he chose Titus. Paul's gospel and ministry would not have been the only items placed under scrutiny, but Titus himself would have undergone tremendous pressure. Paul's courage and conviction certainly made the difference, but if Titus himself was weak and fearful, we doubt that he would have been chosen to face this potentially explosive and even dangerous situation.

Paul might have avoided bringing a Gentile in the first place, but he decided to take one along, and he knew that any person he brought could have become a test case for his message and ministry, as Titus in fact did, and so become a decisive factor in forming Jerusalem's opinion toward him. Thus from this passage alone we can infer that, in terms of the knowledge of God, purity of the heart, and strength of character, Titus was probably unparalleled among Gentile believers.

This high view of Titus is more than our speculation, since there is a richer basis for it. He was entrusted with the task of dealing with the Corinthians. We know what sort of people they could be, but he returned with a good report (2 Corinthians 7:13-16). Paul also sent him to collect donations pledged by them (2 Corinthians 8:6), so he could be trusted with money as well. Regarding God's work, he was eager, zealous, and willing to initiate (2 Corinthians 8:16-17). Paul called him his "partner and fellow worker," and "an honor to Christ" (2 Corinthians 8:23).

Considered Paul's "true son" in the faith (Titus 1:4), Titus was a dependable ministry worker. But in addition to this, he was also a strong leader. Paul trusted him to complete what he himself "left unfinished" in Crete (Titus 1:5), implying that the apostle had full confidence in his competence and character. He was instructed to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5), a task that presumably required authority, knowledge, discernment, and maturity. The fact that Cretans were in general "liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12), reflects on the exceptional courage and skill of Titus to manage troublesome people. He was told to "rebuke them sharply" (Titus 1:13) and "with all authority" (2:15).

In his letter to Titus, it is significant that Paul gives only instructions concerning the things to be said and done accompanied by almost no personal encouragement or theological expositions. He assumes that Titus could and would do all that he says without fear and without fail.

This observation is rendered more reliable when we make a contrast against Paul's letters to Timothy. Among the numerous statements that are apparently designed to excite and assure, the apostle reminds this other "true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2) of the prophecies concerning him, and by this, encourages him to "fight the good fight" (1:18). He is urged to "fan into flames the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6), implying that there is dormant potential, so that by this he could overcome "a spirit of timidity" (1:7), and possibly a tendency that is sensitive to the pressure to become "ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of [Paul] his prisoner" (1:8).

He is repeatedly urged to "be strong" (2:1) and to "endure hardship" (2:3). Paul calls to mind the persecutions he endured, as well as the Lord's faithfulness to deliver him, to encourage Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of" (3:14). In dramatic language, the apostle invokes the very name and presence of God, charging Timothy to "preach the word" (4:2) whether the times are favorable or unfavorable, "for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine" (4:3).

It would be unfair to press the contrast too far. Since our focus is on Titus and his strengths, the above does not care to mention Timothy's good qualities, although he had many. He was also Paul's true son in the faith, trusted with important tasks and delicate situations. There is also the danger of unnecessary inferences. For example, that Paul encouraged Timothy to "be strong" does not *necessarily* mean that Timothy was weak, although it is correct to assume that it is at least an issue with him, so that Paul is not making an irrelevant point. Then, some of the differences might be accounted for due to varying circumstances.

That said, it remains that such personal assurance and encouragement are almost totally absent in Paul's letter to Titus, and as mentioned, the Cretans were not at all easy to handle. The letter provides not even a hint of any flaw or weakness in Titus. Therefore, even if the contrast is not as glaring as it first appears, a genuine difference remains. Titus was also Paul's "true son" in the faith, and at least for the sake of the ministry, the apostle would have given him any additional information and encouragement that he needed. But Paul assumed that if he would give clear and direct instructions to Titus, then that is exactly what would be accomplished. There was no need for any prodding or hand-holding.

Based on the biblical evidence, we must conclude that Titus was most likely a competent, fearless, and resourceful Christian. He was honest, loyal, and could follow instructions, and at the same time, one could hardly find superior leadership material. He was the one for the tough jobs. He was the one who got things done no matter how difficult the people or situation was, or how much pressure he would come under.

And this is the reason that he receives so much attention in this commentary. The relationship between Paul and Timothy is often discussed, but Titus tends to be neglected. Perhaps so much is devoted to Timothy because the New Testament contains more information about him – there are two letters directed to him, each one longer than the one to Titus. Yet if we will spend some time to study and reflect, we shall find much to learn from this other true son in the faith. Then, perhaps Timothy is favored because he is more relatable – many Christians have needs that parallel his.

That final statement might be easier to accept if left unexplained, but it would be inconsistent with my usual style to be so vague. What I mean is that most Christians are weaklings, and are in constant need of encouragement and assurance. The problem is that they also lack the good qualities of Timothy, nor do they have Paul as their teacher. If Timothy had a problem of timidity, Paul's letters were meant to remedy it, to help him overcome it. That these letters provide a permanent record of Paul's solution does not mean that the corresponding problem should remain permanent in us. That would be to defeat the very purpose of the solution. In any case, this is precisely the reason we must study Titus as well, for if we aspire to his strength and resourcefulness, then we must attempt to know him better, so that we may emulate him.

As for his relevance to our study of Galatians, now we should understand better why Titus was an excellent choice, whether Paul brought him because of mere expedience, or whether he intentionally took him up to Jerusalem as a test case or as an example of the fruit of his ministry.

Paul went to Jerusalem "in response to a revelation." This could refer to a direct communication from God that he received, whether in a vision or in some other form, or it could refer to a revelation conveyed to him through another person. If Galatians 2 corresponds to Acts 11, then Paul might be referring to the prophecy of Agabus. And if our passage corresponds to Acts 15, then he might be referring to some direct or mediated revelation that occurred amidst the controversy with the Judaizers at Antioch (v. 1-2).

Sometimes commentators assume that if an event mentioned in one place of Scripture corresponds to an event mentioned in another place, then a particular detail mentioned in the former must be referring to the same thing in the latter. But this is unwarranted. Thus, for example, even if the visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2 corresponds to the famine relief project in Acts 11:29-30, it does not suggest that this "revelation" in Galatians 2:2 must therefore be the prophecy of Agabus. For all we know, Paul could have been confronted with two, three, or several hundred direct and mediated revelations around the same time.

So Paul could be referring to the prophecy of Agabus – that is, if the visit to Jerusalem is the famine relief visit in the first place – but again it might not. In our context, the important point is that Paul went in response to a divine instruction, and not because he was summoned by Jerusalem or because he considered it necessary to obtain approval for his message and ministry.

While in Jerusalem, he "set before them" the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. As many commentators acknowledge, this cannot mean that Paul was seeking Jerusalem's approval, for otherwise this would undermine all that he has just said (1:11-24) and all that he will proceed to say (2:3-14), and would confirm the Judaizers' accusations and arguments against him.

But then, several commentators suggest that, although Paul was not seeking official approval for his message and ministry, he wishes to establish his solidarity with the

apostles, and thereby offset the perhaps overly independent impression conveyed by the earlier verses. However, this misses Paul's emphasis in the passage, and appears to be a contrast imposed upon the text by interpreters who are accustomed to these categories because of their theological and cultural backgrounds, which are not always biblical, and who are thus suspicious of any sort of independence when it comes to ministry authority.

Prevailing theologies of ministry, calling and ordination, and church government usually fail to do justice to what Scripture really teaches about the source of a person's spiritual authority, and out of an implicit deism founded on cessationism, could not help but relegate the source and measure of spiritual authority to human institutions, such as denominations and seminaries.

All individual personalities in Scripture that seem to contradict this scheme are dismissed as exceptions, oddities belonging to a past dispensation. In many cases they have become the enemies of genuine spiritual authority, echoing the Pharisees in the days of the early church, who demanded even of Christ, "By what authority are you doing these things?...And who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23).

If the condition of the post-resurrection church is fundamentally different than before, and in a way that affects this subject, there is no indication of this in Scripture. The religious authorities asked the apostles, "By what power or what name did you do this?" They answered, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 4:7, 10), and not by the authority of the Jerusalem church, even though they had the church's full support. But nowadays Christians are more interested in hearing about the group to which one belongs and from which one derives his authority. They think this way not because they are upholding the biblical idea of the church, but because they are carnal and lack genuine spiritual power.

Theological reasons that have been offered for this mentality seem to suggest that after the apostles all believers have lost direct contact with Christ, and that the Catholics were correct after all. And even God is now forbidden to select individuals for special ministry apart from the usual denominational procedure. This has very little to do with guarding the sufficiency of Scripture, but it is about protecting man's traditions. And the way they think about spiritual authority would make church and ministry practically impossible in some countries. Their doctrine is based on tradition and culture. It does not respect God's sovereignty, Scripture's actual teaching, or the Spirit's freedom and power.

A corporate ministry model and a complex authority structure existed since Moses, but God sovereignly called prophets that, in many ways, operated independently of the usual authority structure. They are then accepted because of their calling, their message, their piety, and their fruit, even though they lacked the proper association with the accepted institutions. (That said, some of them they were indeed rejected during their ministries because they lacked the respected human associations and credentials.) Those who judged mainly by the latter were enemies of God's work, as represented by the Pharisees and the apostate priesthood of Jesus' time.



Again, it is argued that the coming of Christ had brought about certain changes, so that the same people who would crucify John the Baptist today as a renegade preacher would have refrained from doing so before the coming of Christ. But opponents to genuine spiritual authority used arguments very similar to what we find today against even the apostle Paul, who at times had to defend his call to the ministry, at times his position as an apostle, at times even his conversion, and that against those who claimed to be Christians.

A minister's authority is established, first, by the call of God. Since knowledge of such is sometimes private, and not subject to demonstration other than the person's own testimony concerning it, we may call this the subjective aspect or measure of the call. And second, the call is confirmed not by ecclesiastical recognition – this may or may not accompany it – but by the biblical standard concerning a minister's qualifications, which we may call the objective aspect or measure of the call. Let human credentials be damned, whether one possesses them or not. An extreme cessationism may reject any subjective sense of the call, but since such a doctrine cannot be substantiated from Scripture, and even turns Scripture against the Spirit, let it be damned as well.

Many legitimate ministers will face questions concerning their calling and authority, especially those who are commissioned to perform some unusual task or to subvert certain aspects of the established structure. May they never be swayed by human pressure to abandon their heavenly vision. Some of those who owe their structures and their traditions to someone like Martin Luther would have condemned him today by their very structures and traditions. And that is why they are not Martin Luther. Now they stand in the positions of the Pharisees and the Catholics. A danger not to be dismissed is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Here the text itself forbids us from making it the other side of a contrast between independence and solidarity. This is not to say that there was no solidarity, nor to say that Paul did not prefer it, but it is not the main concern of this passage.

First, Paul went in response to a revelation, meaning that he might not have gone at all if he had not been sent by a divine command. The visit was occasioned by special divine guidance – it was not originally on Paul's agenda, but was added to it by the Lord. Therefore, the visit itself and the setting forth of the gospel before the Jerusalem leaders could not have come from Paul's own desire to gain their approval, as if he needed them to confirm that what he had been preaching was true, or as if he needed assurance that he had been called by Christ to preach. He needed no approval, confirmation, assurance, or permission from them.

Second, he went and presented his gospel "for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain." This does not contradict our approach to this passage unless we ignore the surrounding verses, and unless we impose our own cultural concerns and categories upon it. If this means that Paul wanted a confirmation of the accuracy of his message, so that he would not have done all that he did for nothing, then certainly he would be undermining himself. He had just said that his message came to him by divine revelation, but if so, then there was no superior or even equal authority by which his message could be verified, and

it would be strange to require human confirmation at this point. The same is true regarding his calling and authority. These came to him by revelation, from Jesus Christ himself, and to require human approval at this time would undermine and contradict this.

The context explains what Paul means. Verse 5 says that he did not give in "so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you," that is, with the Galatians or with Gentiles in general. Although this statement is immediately applicable to verses 3 and 4, it also reflects his concern in verse 2 and in an upcoming passage, verses 11-14. Paul's concern was not directly about solidarity, but about whether Jerusalem would consider his message and ministry legitimate *so that* his work would not be frustrated by a contradictory doctrinal pronouncement or contravening missionary effort from Jerusalem. Gaining Jerusalem's official agreement was also an effective tactic against the Judaizers, although not a necessary one.

That is, from an individual's perspective, Paul wished to preserve his previous work and minimize hindrance for his future labor. From a broader perspective, he wished to protect the true gospel that so many among the Gentiles had already believed, so that they could hold fast to it and circulate it. He presented his message to the Jerusalem leaders, not hoping for a confirmation for his own assurance, but hoping for agreement so that the gospel – which he already knew to be true by revelation – would not be taken away or otherwise undermined and attacked among the Gentiles.

Paul's concern, then, was the effectiveness of his efforts, and not the truth of his message or the legitimacy of his ministry – he was assured of the latter by divine revelation. And precisely because he was sure about the truth of his message and the legitimacy of his ministry, if the Jerusalem leaders had disagreed with him and censored him, Paul would have defied them and went his own way. This would have produced a great schism between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, dividing Jerusalem and Antioch, so to speak, and might have severely undermined the effectiveness of Paul's previous and future missionary efforts.

Let us be clear as to what all of this means. If Jerusalem had rejected Paul's message and ministry, he would have rejected them and continued with his work – he was not seeking their approval, since he had Christ's command to preach and a revelation as to what he was to preach. Paul would have been in the right, and Jerusalem in the wrong. This would have added to the tremendous pressure that he was already experiencing from those who claimed to be believers. Keep in mind that the apostle Paul was not *the* apostle Paul that all Christians revere today. During his lifetime he constantly came under suspicion and criticism even from those who were supposedly his brothers in Christ. So we can understand why he did not want Jerusalem to work against him. He was not there to seek approval for his message and ministry, and based on verses 6-10, he did not even seek a close partnership. He knew he was legitimate, but he was there to make sure that Jerusalem would not get in his way.

There are difficulties with verses 3-5, and their exact meaning remains the subject of debate. The trouble has to do with the broken and agitated language in the Greek, and the

relation of these verses to the event described in those surrounding it. The result is that it is not completely clear as to what happened and when it happened. However, the ambiguities and uncertainties are historical in nature, and in this case do not affect the theological significance of Paul's statements. In other words, we might be curious about the historical aspect of the situation described, but the difficulties presented do not generate confusion for any issue that relates to doctrine and conduct.

A simple way to illustrate the difficulties is to read these verses in a more literal translation, such as the ESV, which retains some of the confusion in the original language: "But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in – who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery – to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." In contrast, the NIV smoothes out the language in its translation, and conveys well what Paul is probably saying, but in doing so it also obscures some of the problems.

For the sake of convenience, let us assume that the visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1 overlaps with either the visit to Jerusalem in Acts 11 or the one in Acts 15, although as mentioned earlier, there is no definitive reason for insisting that it must be identified with either. But we shall tolerate the assumption for now, since it narrows our options and helps to illustrate the various possible interpretations.

If Galatians 2:1 refers to the visit in Acts 11, then the main purpose of the visit was famine relief. Then 2:2 would mean that, while he was there, Paul had a private meeting with the leaders to discuss his message and ministry. The difficulty is in how verses 3-5 fit into this scenario. It could be that while he was there along with his companions, some of the Judaizers in Jerusalem took the opportunity to challenge Paul's gospel, appealing to the case of Titus to make their attack concrete, and putting pressure upon them to circumcise him. Note that if 2:1 overlaps with Acts 11, this would suggest or at least permit an early date for the letter to the Galatians.

Or, we could note the fact that verse 6 directly continues the thought that started in verse 2, so that we could read, "I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders...those men added nothing to my message." This is in fact Paul's primary assertion here. We will mention this again when we come to verse 6, but its significance at this point is that this makes verses 3-5 an interjection into a thought that Paul begins in verse 2 and continues in verse 6. Since there is nothing in these verses that *necessarily* associates this event in verses 3-5 with the visit in Jerusalem, it is possible that these verses refer to something that happened on another occasion altogether.

That is, it might be that Paul is bringing up this dispute over Titus because he just mentioned in verse 1 that he brought him to Jerusalem on this visit, which might or might not be the same occasion as the incident mentioned here in verses 3-5. If this is correct, then it means that while Titus was present at Jerusalem on this visit, and as Paul presented the gospel of salvation by faith alone, the matter of circumcising Titus was not even

mentioned by the Jerusalem leaders. Rather, it was assumed by all involved that circumcision was not required. The matter only arose when, on a separate occasion, some "false brothers" pressed the issue with Paul and his men.

If this is the case, then when Paul writes that some false brothers "infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom that we have in Christ and to make us slaves," he could be referring to the dispute that happened at Antioch (Acts 15:1-5), and that occasioned the Jerusalem council. And if Galatians 2:1-2 overlaps with Acts 15, then 2:3-5 would have occurred prior to 2:1-2. That verses 3-5 is an interjection describing a separate occasion would be consistent with the broken language that we find in these verses; however, there is still nothing in verses 1-6 to *require* this interpretation.

If Galatians 2:1 overlaps with Acts 15, 2:2 might be referring to a private meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders that convened apart from a larger conference. Then, if 2:4 also overlaps with Acts 15, did the false brother infiltrate this private meeting or the larger session? In any case, we read in Acts 15:5, "Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.'"

Once we assume that 2:4 overlaps with Acts 15, Paul's disordered and agitated language at this point suggests to some interpreters a sense of irritation and disappointment that he had with the Jerusalem leaders – this would, of course, include the apostles. Indeed, for a church that had been established since the beginning, how did Judaizers with such strong sentiments against the true gospel manage to infiltrate their meetings? Such individuals should have been corrected, silenced, or expelled years before. What were they still doing there among the Christians?

The word translated "infiltrated" in the NIV actually suggests the idea of "smuggled" or even "planted" in, or as in the ESV, "secretly brought in." This implies that the Judaizers had a powerful backer among the Jerusalem leaders, although interpreters usually exonerate the likes of Peter and James. Then again, it is pointed out that since verses 4 and 5 do not necessarily overlap with 2:1-3, Paul could be referring to the Judaizers in Jerusalem while thinking of their behavior in Antioch, that is, to denote what type of people they were.

Further, when the Judaizers rose to oppose the gospel, why did Paul even have to stand his ground? That is, they were in Jerusalem after all, and it was up to the church leaders there to moderate the meeting. When an anti-gospel proposal was asserted, they should have immediately slammed it down and silenced it. The fact that pressure was applied to Paul and his companions, and that they had to stand their ground for the gospel when he was in the Jerusalem territory seems to indicate that these leaders, including the apostles, had been weak in protecting this essential aspect of the gospel, namely, that both Jews and non-Jews are saved only through faith in Christ apart from Jewish laws and customs.

Some even see from the text the possibility that the Jerusalem leaders had asked Paul and his companions to give in to the Judaizers, although they did not agree with their doctrine.

But even if the "we" in verses 4 and 5 includes the Jerusalem apostles, so that they did not take part in urging the circumcision of Titus, the question remains as to why the Judaizers had a voice there in the first place. In this view, although the Jerusalem apostles agreed with Paul's gospel in principle, to his great consternation and disappointment, they did not do all that they could to preach and enforce it.

Again, there is insufficient evidence in the text to require this understanding. However, we cannot rule it out simply because it suggests some serious deficiencies in the Jerusalem leaders. Their inspiration as apostles and the inerrancy of Scripture are not at all in question here, and the biblical evidence confirms that they agreed with Paul's message (2:6-10). But that they were weak in enforcing the aspect of the gospel now under discussion was entirely possible, considering Peter's compromise and hypocrisy in 2:11-14, and some might say, also their behavior in passages like Acts 21:17-25.

That Paul was strong where they were weak was perhaps what qualified him above others to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (2:7-9) – a gospel that is unencumbered by Jewish laws and customs – and to withstand the severe persecution that came because of it (5:11). His disordered and agitated language, then, can be explained by the fact that he was irritated and disappointed with the Jerusalem leaders on this issue. One intention of this section of the letter, however, is to show that the apostles agreed with his message and endorsed his ministry. And therefore the tension is generated, as Barclay writes, in Paul trying to avoid saying too little on the one hand and saying too much on the other.

That said, we affirm once again that this is only one possible interpretation, but one that is likely if all of Galatians 2:1-5 overlaps with Acts 15. Moreover, verses 6-10 prevent us from taking our interpretation too far toward such a direction, since it indicates Jerusalem's agreement with Paul's message and endorsement of his ministry. So if they compromised at all (e.g. 2:11-14), it was only because they were weak in character, and not because they disagreed with Paul in doctrine or preached a different message.

The historical aspect of the situation – what happened and when it happened – carries some significance with the Galatians, since Paul is probably responding to something that the Judaizers said. Perhaps they distorted the facts to assert their doctrine. But if so, then the Galatians would know the exact situation that Paul is addressing – it is the very one that the Judaizers mentioned, only that Paul is now telling his side and setting the record straight.

However, just because the historical aspect of the passage is important to the Galatians does not mean that we must know as much about it as they do in order to derive from it the full benefits intended for us. There are some uncertainties as to Paul's meaning concerning the historical side of the situation, but unlike the Galatians, we are not directly affected by the Judaizers' attack. Of course, we do face false teachers who assert similar doctrinal distortions, and we find that Scripture equips us with the principles to answer them, no matter how they arise in each generation.

So, regarding the historical aspect of the passage, if the information is not there, then it means that we do not need to know it. What we do know is that at a given place and a given time, and possibly on the same occasion as 2:1-2, Paul and his companions were pressured into circumcising Titus. They resisted, and maintained that Gentiles could receive complete salvation by faith in Jesus Christ without undergoing circumcision, and without adopting Jewish laws and customs. These are God's people in the truest and fullest sense, and they are spiritually inferior to no one. This is so that the truth of the gospel might remain with the Galatians, and with the Gentiles. All of this lies on the surface of the text – there is still more to notice on this level, as we will see below – and it is best to refrain from speculation beyond this point, but derive from the passage only what is there. In this way we avoid the danger of building elaborate interpretations, especially ones that affect doctrine and conduct, on conjectures and uncertainties.

That said, although we can infer only a little about the history, the passage provides much information that is relevant to any generation about this doctrinal aberration and the proper perspective with which we must confront it. And this information is communicated in such a manner that does not demand a precise understanding of the historical details behind the text. Thus it may not tell us everything that we wish to know to satisfy our curiosity, but it contains everything that Paul wishes to convey and that God requires us to learn.

First, we know the nature of the troublemakers – Paul calls them "false brothers." These are people who claim to be Christians, but their claim is false. This means that they are in fact non-Christians, and therefore destined for hell. They are false believers not only because of the manner in which they assert their false doctrine (i.e. "infiltrated our ranks"), but as discussed earlier (1:6-9), because of the fact that they believe and/or preach this false doctrine. Those who affirm or promote such a doctrine in any way are unbelievers, but it is important to keep in mind that they *claim* to be believers.

This point is most significant. There are those who reject the faith outright without pretense, but then there are those who claim to be something that they are not. For example, although Catholic doctrine differs in its doctrinal aberrations, in principle it affirms the same errors as those addressed by Paul's letter. This makes one equivalent to the other, since they both fall under the apostle's broad condemnation against a different gospel, not that there is any other.

Since this is the case, it necessarily means that all Catholics who believe as Catholics should (not just what they *call* themselves) are in fact non-Christians, even though they claim to be Christians. And in turn this means that God will send all Catholics to hell, where they will suffer everlasting extreme torment, just like he would the rest of the non-Christians and unbelievers. In practice, this means that Catholics must never be treated as if they are Christians, although they claim to depend on Jesus Christ for their salvation (since this is not all that they claim). They are no more closer to salvation than Mormons, Buddhists, and atheists. They are unregenerate individuals that are legitimate targets for evangelism – they need to hear the true gospel and turn away from their sacrilegious beliefs and rituals.

Some commentators stumble over Paul's characterization of the Judaizers as "false brothers." Among those who call themselves Evangelicals, the reluctance to accept Paul's verdict tends to be less blatant, but it is difficult to shake the impression that they struggle with it. To illustrate, L. Ann Jervis writes, "In defending himself Paul caricatures his opponents as false," "He obviously feels threatened by their actions," and "Whether Paul's presentation of the rival evangelists' position is fair or not, it is clear that Paul was willing to go to almost any lengths to defend the Gentiles' rights to be believers in Jesus Christ without having to adopt the Jewish law."<sup>11</sup>

In commenting on the term "false brothers," R. Alan Cole writes, "It is tempting to see in this a denial that these Judaizers are acting the part of true brothers at all. They are utterly lacking in love."<sup>12</sup> How "acting in love" carries any relevance to what Paul means by the term is unexplained. But other than that, the statement is curiously padded. So the fact that Paul calls them false does not settle the question but only makes it "tempting" to see them as false. And even if they are false, it is not that they are false brothers, but that they are not "acting the part of true brothers."

Then, he writes, "But the NEB may be right in going further with its blunt translation 'sham-Christians.' In this case, Paul would be denying the very reality of the Christian faith of the Judaizers." He entertains the possibility that it "may be right" to understand the term "false brothers" to mean...well, false brothers. And if they are false brothers, then "the very reality of the Christian faith" is also denied to the Judaizers. This is correct despite the weak language. To say it more clearly, the meaning here is that if these people are false brothers as Paul says, then they are sham-Christians – that is, *not* Christians – or people who pretend to be Christians.

He continues, "This is a serious charge; but Paul knew them far better than we can ever do." If this offers hope that Cole tries to take biblical inerrancy seriously, he squashes it as he completes the thought and writes, "although it is true that in theological controversy he sometimes uses extreme language (Phil. 3:2)." If read by itself, the second part of the statement could mean that Paul sometimes uses strong words against his opponents, but these words accurately describe their true condition. This would be acceptable, but Cole means something else. The remark is said against the first part of the statement, which says that Paul knew his opponents better than we can ever do when he calls them false brothers. And Cole says this in the context of considering whether the term "false brothers" means that the Judaizers were non-Christians who pretend to be Christians.

In other words, the second part of Cole's statement neutralizes the first, meaning that although Paul knew his opponents better when he calls them false brothers, he sometimes uses "extreme language," *so that* what he says might be an exaggeration. So, although Cole refrains from denying that the term "false brothers" means what it obviously does, since "Paul knew them far better than we can ever do," that he sometimes uses "extreme language" – exaggerated language – means that in this case we cannot be sure whether the Judaizers are really non-Christians after all.

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<sup>11</sup> L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 54.

<sup>12</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Galatians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 105.

He offers Philippians 3:2 as an example that Paul uses extreme language. The verse says, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh." The denunciation is indeed strong, but by what standard may we call it extreme, in the sense that it is an exaggeration that is in fact untrue and inaccurate? Christ himself used stronger language than this against the Pharisees. If we read Scripture on its own terms – on God's terms – then we will say that this is an appropriate way to describe the Judaizers and false teachers. If the language seems extreme, it is because the errors that it addresses are so extreme, vile, and evil. But Cole takes it as a reflection on Paul and not the Judaizers.

Cole fails to see Paul's language from the proper perspective because he reads Scripture on his own terms, by a standard formed from his culture, background, and personality. So when Paul's language appears extreme on this scale – that is, Cole's personal comfort – he takes it as an exaggeration, and in a way that renders it a false statement. The idea of "false" in the term "false brothers" is not one of degree, but it is an absolute. People cannot be more or less false Christians – they are either Christians or they are not. And Paul says they are not. If this is an exaggeration, then this means that Paul calls them false Christians when they are in fact true Christians. Thus by his comment Cole commits himself to a denial of biblical inerrancy, although this might not be his intention.

One who has not been disappointed with such "scholarship" over and over again might be surprised that any Christian commentator could stumble over the term given what Paul says in 1:6-9. There he asserts, more than one time and in more than one way, that anyone who preaches and/or believes a "gospel" different than the one that he preached to the Galatians and different than the one that they first accepted is "eternally condemned." Since the individuals in 2:4 advance a different doctrine, they are therefore false brothers, destined for hell. The reasoning is so simple and direct that one would expect any child to understand it.

Even more perplexing is that commentators seem to have less resistance against this emphatic passage than the mere term "false brothers." And by this fact we have located the underlying spiritual problem – namely, they affirm the message but oppose the application. In other words, they are hypocrites who pay lip service to the inspiration of Scripture, but balk at any concrete application of a teaching that they in fact oppose. Paul is permitted to say anything he wishes until he applies it to actual people. If they are reluctant to apply biblical condemnations against those in the distant past, even those whom the entire New Testament denounces as the enemies of God, we wonder if anyone in the present day could be condemned in their eyes.

This reluctance to accept Paul's application of 1:6-9 to the individuals in 2:4 disqualifies them as biblical expositors or for any sort of ministry, because they have dismissed the whole point of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The apostle stresses in the strongest manner possible that anyone who preaches or believes anything different, such as the Judaizers, are eternally condemned. Later he would add, "for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (2:21), so that the Judaizers' message is a denial of the gospel and the work of Christ. Now if that does not make them "false," what does? The



commentators feign assent to Paul's message, but draw back when he applies it to actual people in the same letter. This makes it certain that the flock of God cannot depend on them as biblical expositors or as guardians of the faith.

Justification by faith is deeply ingrained in some believers, so that they are quick to condemn as false brothers those who deny or distort the doctrine. This is biblical and commendable, but it does not mean that they are free from the pattern of hypocrisy above. The sin of paying lip service to a biblical teaching while opposing its application is rampant, and shows itself when it comes to many other doctrines.

For example, some of us have been persecuted by professing believers for affirming that Scripture means what it says when it states that non-Christians are fools – that is, morons and idiots. There are Christians who acknowledge that unbelievers are "fools" in a poetic sense, a sense that is ambiguous and that carries little meaning and offense. But by it we mean that all non-Christians are stupid people, that they are intellectually retarded and defective.

Scripture is just as clear about this as its teaching that non-Christians are sinners. And here also, we do not mean sinners in a poetic sense, but we mean that non-Christians are wicked and filthy people. And this is what we were before God saved us. There should be nothing vague, or poetic, or beautiful about the idea. Any professing believer who does not have this meaning in mind when he uses the word "sinners" implicitly denies a basic tenet of the Christian faith, and this also reflects negatively on his understanding of salvation.

As long as Christians affirm these two teachings only in a poetic sense, they are paying lip service to God and Scripture, but they are exposed when they criticize someone who actually applies them. We affirm with Scripture that all non-Christians are stupid and evil. They are not smart and not good. For us this is not a matter of personal satisfaction, nor is it a mere debate tactic, as it has been alleged even by those who claim to be Christians. It is first a matter of reverence toward God and Scripture. It is a matter of biblical inerrancy.

Because the Bible is inerrant, then it is correct when it calls non-Christians stupid and evil, and we are correct when we repeat this teaching. Those Christians who dare to oppose this expose themselves as enemies of Christ – they affirm the message on the one hand, but oppose the application on the other. These hypocrites are useless as servants of God. They are the very problems that true ministers of the gospel labor to overcome.

Scripture does not refer to the intellectual aspect of man's fallen condition with a rather respectable-sounding term like "the noetic effects of sin" – it calls them morons.<sup>13</sup> Even if the teaching produces no theological or practical significance, we must still affirm it just because it is the truth that God has revealed in Scripture. But the implications are in fact tremendous and far-reaching.

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<sup>13</sup> See Vincent Cheung, "A Moron By Any Other Name," "Professional Morons," and *Commentary on Ephesians*.

Only when we affirm with Scripture that the non-Christian is both stupid and evil, and not just evil, do we truly acknowledge the full extent of his fall. And then we may in turn affirm the corresponding solution in Christ. Thus to underplay either aspect of man's fall is to obscure the glory of the gospel. What an evil thing it is to do this. And this is why those who oppose us on this issue commit a great sin against the Lord and treachery against all the believers who contend for the true gospel, since not only do they refuse to proclaim the full extent of the fall and the full power of salvation, but they persecute those who do. And in this manner they have become enemies against the grace of Christ, devaluing and dishonoring his blood and his sacrifice.

These hypocrites pay lip service to the inerrancy of Scripture, but when God speaks something in it that they find difficult to accept, that stirs up their fear of men, or that threatens their respectability or appearance before the world, they turn from it and refuse to accept it. Then, when someone merely repeats and applies what God says on the subject, they throng to silence him. The real object of their hatred is the Lord. They resent him for saying such things.

Of course, justification by faith and the noetic effects of sin are just two examples of how men often pretend to agree with divine revelation, but pick up stones against anyone who dares to apply it, and who is humble enough before God to proclaim it without question or hesitation. This pattern of hypocrisy is seen in professing believers regarding just about anything that the Bible teaches.

As another example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." A person does not really believe this passage unless he can say, "If you are a homosexual or an adulterer, unless you repent, believe the gospel, and turn from your sins, God will send you to hell, where you will suffer extreme pain and agony forever." This is what the passage means. But nowadays those who call themselves Christians profess belief in Scripture on the one hand, and instead of warning homosexuals and adulterers, they ordain them to the ministry.

Second, we know the motive of the false brothers. Paul writes that they advance their doctrine "to make us slaves." Later in the letter he adds, "Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh" (6:13). The evil intention of these false brothers is to claim the Gentile as their own disciples and to subjugate their faith under their own customs. The circumcision of the Gentiles would signify the success of their proselytization campaign, and not a covenant relationship with God.

Some commentators again insinuate that Paul's judgment is false or unfair. They seem rather keen to affirm the sincerity of the Judaizers, and relativize the controversy so that it becomes only a matter of perspective. A few describe the Judaizers' intention in almost noble terms. But if these are not false brothers, and if their motive is not evil, then Paul

would be wrong to speak as he does. The commentators cannot affirm biblical inspiration on the one hand and so flippantly suggest errors and exaggerations on the other.

The matter of inspiration and inerrancy is settled as a separate and prior question, but once it is assumed, the only possible interpretation here is that these are sham-Christians who introduce their false doctrine with selfish and sinister intentions. Since we have addressed this revolt against biblical authority under the first point, we will not take time to repeat our complaint.

The verse, like many others, raises the issue of judging motives. Since only God can perceive a person's thoughts and dispositions, and in ourselves we have no such ability, it is usually assumed that it is wrong for a man to declare or judge another's intentions. Although the principle is correct, the inference is false. This is because the common assumption ignores the fact that God has revealed much information about people's thoughts and intentions in Scripture (Hebrews 4:12).

We cannot perceive a person's heart, but God can perceive it and tell us about it. We can then repeat and apply his verdict. The refusal to do this does not come from a humble spirit, but a defiance against divine authority and biblical inspiration. Our inability to directly perceive people's thoughts and motives thus becomes an excuse to avoid confrontation. True humility readily applies the divine verdict against human depravity. But the arrogant and rebellious man pretends that God has not spoken.

Third, we know the significance of the dispute. Paul notes that nothing less than "the truth of the gospel" is at stake. Since the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), and since to have no gospel or a false gospel is to be "eternally condemned" (Galatians 1:6-9), salvation itself is at stake. This theological controversy is literally a matter of life and death – that is, of eternal life and death, and of heaven and hell.

Paul fought hard to preserve this true gospel, so that its truth – the truth that saves – could remain. And this is why when the Galatians were tempted to follow another way, Paul called them stupid (3:1). Likewise, the Reformers fought to set men free from Rome, so that men might continue to have access to salvation through Christ. And like the Galatians, those who are attracted by the doctrines of Rome are very stupid people, since there is no salvation in the Catholic religion, but only futility and damnation.

But Rome is not the sole enemy of the gospel. Some have infiltrated our ranks, claiming to be Protestants or Evangelicals, to introduce confusion into the proper understanding of justification by faith. Here we have in mind the theologies of the New Perspective, the Federal Vision, some versions of so-called Messianic Christianity, and so on. Although the circumstances differ from Paul's day, the darkness of men's hearts remains the same, and the conflict is similar on the spiritual plane.

The present passage offers us the encouragement, understanding, and the authority to oppose them without restraint. These are false brothers who spread heresies out of evil motives, and at stake is again the truth of the gospel. Of course, we must avoid making

unwarranted generalizations, lest we falsely condemn others. But after careful examination, we must apply the divine verdict – a false gospel is a false gospel, and a false brother is a false brother. When faced with a false gospel, whether it is something similar or different from what is considered here – the threat is always against the true gospel, and thus demands the same decisive and vehement reaction.

In a sense, there is no such thing as a petty theological disagreement, because the truth is at stake each time. Truth is never trivial, and whenever we believe something that is not the truth, we believe a lie. However, we do not fight, or split, or expel people from the church over every dispute, for we tolerate some theological disagreements in order to maintain peace and to allow discussion. The line is not drawn between important and unimportant doctrines, since there is no such thing as an unimportant biblical doctrine. Instead, the line that is drawn defines the *relative* significance of these important doctrines. When the dispute affects salvation, so that the consequence more final, then the matter is more urgent, and our reaction more drastic.

The line that defines the relative significance of biblical doctrines is often drawn here, that is, with salvation as the pivotal point. But this is in fact not strict enough, since it is determined by man-centered concerns. Even more important than the salvation of our souls, our deliverance from hellfire into everlasting life and peace, is the honor and glory of God. This is the end of our salvation in the first place. Therefore, false doctrines that misrepresent the nature of God are to be combatted with the same force and haste as those that obscure man's way to salvation through Christ.

For example, the heresy of open theism, even if we suppose for the moment that it does not affect salvation, cannot be long tolerated. Otherwise, it would be as if we say, "Let God suffer dishonor for a while. He can endure it, and no harm will come to him. The truth will be clear to all on the last day. Meanwhile, it is more important to address those false doctrines that threaten our salvation." To think this way is to allow self-preservation to dictate our spiritual priorities. This point is often obscured, since salvation is indeed the most noble among our many needs and wants. Still, we cannot take the sinful attitude that it is more urgent to save men than to defend God's honor, so that we pursue the former but neglect the latter, or make the former our highest reference point in theology and ministry rather than the latter.

Paul's broken and agitated language continues into verse 6, perhaps denoting great distress over the items being addressed. The expression, "those who seemed to be important," occurs in various forms in 2:2, 2:6 (twice), and 2:9. This is better seen in a translation like the ESV, since the NIV obscures the repetition and consistency. The ESV translates the expression as "those who seemed influential." The NASB has "those who were of reputation," and the RSV, "those who were reputed to be something." Verse 9 says, "those reputed to be pillars," but of course the connection with 2:2 and 2:6 must not be missed.

This notable use of the expression is probably sarcastic. Given the context and purpose of the passage (2:1-10), as well as the interruption within verse 6 itself (which we will examine below), Paul is obviously not stressing the exalted status of the Jerusalem apostles.

To illustrate, it is likely that sarcasm is intended if within several sentences of broken and agitated language I were to refer to a group of men thus: "Those somebodies...those important people...oh, those big shots!...those high and mighty ones!"

As mentioned, it is possible that Paul is at least a little annoyed with the Jerusalem apostles in that they failed to prevent the Judaizers from going as far as they did. It is also possible that they were not very strong at implementing that aspect of the gospel under discussion, as suggested by 2:11-13. That said, the apostles were probably not the primary target of Paul's hostility here, even if a degree of disappointment with their performance is implied. He assumes their legitimacy in verses 7-9, and part of his present argument depends on this. Rather, the main force of the sarcasm is more likely directed against the inordinate deference – whether as a matter of conviction or merely a tool for manipulation – that the Judaizers attribute to the Jerusalem leaders, and in connection with this, their deprecation of Paul's ministry and authority through a false contrast against these apostles.

The interruption within verse 6 reads, "whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance." "Whatever they were" refers to the differences between Paul and "those who seemed to be important." These are probably the things that the Judaizers hold against Paul as the advantages that the Jerusalem apostles have over him, such as their earthly association with Jesus, including the fact that James is the natural brother of the Lord.

The carnal man equates these natural distinctions with spiritual advantages. But whether the Jerusalem apostles possess any spiritual advantage over Paul because of their earthly distinctions and experiences depends on how closely they followed the Lord's doctrine and example. Regarding this, the Gospels record their repeated confusion and unbelief. It was not until after the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that these apostles began to exhibit the knowledge, maturity, and boldness that Christ demanded from them. But the same resources that made them strong in the faith have been given to Paul, who has forsaken all human credentials so that he may know Christ in the power of his resurrection (Philippians 3:10).

Thus the Judaizers form their opinions about the spiritual status of men based on superficial, earthly, and non-spiritual factors. On the other hand, God's judgment transcends appearances, human credentials and associations, and other natural distinctions, showing "no partiality" (ESV). Therefore, the Judaizers' perspective is fundamentally contrary to God's, so that their respect for the apostles and their disdain for Paul count for nothing.

As long as we kowtow to human associations and credentials, we will fail to perceive true spiritual fruit and power, and we will fail to recognize counterfeit spiritual authority. From the perspective of one who has been called by God to the ministry, unless he is delivered from this carnal mentality, he will never attain the full extent of the spiritual freedom and boldness granted by the divine commission. He will be easily intimidated by men, since his opponents will almost always include those who possess greater human recognition. But one who submits to God's perspective and standard of judgment can say with Paul that

superficial credentials are irrelevant. They make no difference to him because they make no difference to God. And since God is not swayed by them, then neither is he.

The end of verse 6 completes the thought that Paul started in verse 2, so that we could read, "I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders...those men added nothing to my message." Again, it was not that Paul submitted his message and ministry before the apostles for their evaluation. He knew that he was right, and if the apostles had contradicted him or attempted to add to his message, they would have been wrong, and Paul would have continued without change, although perhaps less effectively due to resistance from Jerusalem. So without implying submission or inferiority, the verse makes a factual statement, that the Jerusalem apostles added nothing to Paul's gospel. This in turn means that, although it makes no difference to Paul, the apostles agree with him and not the Judaizers.

The solidarity between Paul and Jerusalem is deeper than the mere fact that the apostles "added nothing" to his message. Verses 7 and 8 indicate that the apostles acknowledge two things – that Paul has been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and that God has been at work in Paul's ministry as he carries out this task. Thus these verses describe a positive recognition of Paul's legitimacy and authority.

This recognition is in turn characterized by two things. First, Paul's legitimacy and authority are not conferred but perceived by the apostles. God was the one who conferred upon Paul his ministry to the Gentiles. Jerusalem could neither replace nor oppose God on the matter. Second, the legitimacy and authority of Paul parallel that of Peter, whose place is usually not questioned at least because of his earthly association with Christ and foundational role in the church since the beginning. And if Paul is just as legitimate and authoritative as Peter, then to undermine Paul is also to undermine Peter.

If this discredits the Judaizers' account of Paul's relationship with Jerusalem, verse 9 proceeds to complete the refutation. "Those who seemed important" are finally named – they are James, Peter, and John, the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church. Contrary to the hopes and claims of the Judaizers, instead of censoring or correcting Paul's message, they gave him "the right hand of fellowship." This clasping of the right hand signals an official friendship between the two parties.

This in effect puts the Judaizers, who oppose Paul, *outside* of the apostolic circle and the main thrust of the Christian movement. Thus since Jerusalem agrees with Paul, and Paul disagrees with the Judaizers, this means that the Judaizers are in fact the real deceivers and false teachers, and the enemies of the gospel. By this point in the letter, Paul has provided more than sufficient refutation to all those arguments of the Judaizers that are based on personal attacks, although he will go even further starting from verse 11, which will then lead to his main theological summary and argument.

Nevertheless, contrary to some commentators, there is no indication of a close partnership here. Still more remote is the suggestion that the text balances out the emphasis of Paul's

independence in the previous passage. Neither is there any suggestion of "mutual accountability" or direct cooperation. Even if their relationship entails any of this, it cannot be derived from these statements. All that can be inferred from the passage is that they agreed to go their separate ways knowing that they would labor toward the same overall goal.

These errors of interpretation seem to come from a modern philosophy of ministry, taken from recent secular policies regarding business management and human cooperation, and imposed by force upon the biblical text. Theological errors often occur when a non-biblical theory or standard is accepted as "good," and since the Bible teaches that which is "good," it is then assumed that it also endorses this theory or standard. This reverses the proper order. Rather, since the Bible is our ultimate authority, we derive from it our idea of good, and then evaluate any theory or standard by this. And when we do this, we see that the Bible does not teach a rigid principle of "team ministry," or "mutual accountability," and neither does it condemn ministries that exercise some sort of independence from the usual authority structures. Thus we must refrain from making either positive or negative judgments regarding a church, ministry, or person on this basis alone.

These apostles agreed to focus on different parts of the church's overall mission. Christ commanded his disciples to preach to the world, but the commission belongs to the entire church, and not to any one person. Moreover, the work of evangelization consists of more than the act of speaking the gospel. Many related tasks must be done to make it possible and effective. These include the generation and distribution of financial resources, the work of administration, theological research and education, ministries of mercy, and bringing up godly children by their parents in the home. All these and many other factors contribute to the church's overall success in fulfilling Christ's command for spiritual world conquest. And the recognition of this principle is necessary before the church could properly honor the role of each member of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:14-26).

"The poor" in verse 10 probably refers to impoverished Jewish believers, and thus "their poor" in some translations. Many of the Jerusalem Christians lived in abject poverty, due to famine, persecution, and other factors. The second part of the verse seems to exhibit some indignation on Paul's part, as he was already eager to do that "very thing" requested by the apostles. If there is any indication of direct cooperation between Paul and Jerusalem, here it is in verse 10, although the nature of this cooperation would be a different sort than what commentators wish to find, and sometimes illegitimately deduce, from the previous verses. This is not to assert that there is any malice between Jerusalem and Antioch. Rather, the point is that although the passage indicates an essential agreement between the two, it does not offer evidence of an intimate and involved ministry partnership as alleged by some commentators.

## **GALATIANS 2:11-14**

**When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.**

**When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"**

Verse 11 begins Paul's account of a confrontation he had with Peter at Antioch. Then, the middle of verse 14 begins what is either a quotation or paraphrase of what Paul said to Peter. It seems possible from the language and content of the rest of the passage (to verse 21) that Paul transitions from recounting what he said to what he is now saying to the Galatians. However, it is difficult to specify the precise point where this transition takes place. Thus our English translations are not unanimous on where Paul's speech to Peter ends, as indicated by where each closes the quotation.

Some of them close the speech at the end of verse 14 (RSV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB, NET, ISV), so that the rest of the chapter (v. 15-21) becomes Paul's direct address to the Galatians. Fung complains that this is "most unlikely," because "the thought of that verse is incomplete without the explanation which follows."<sup>14</sup> But this reason is too weak to affect the discussion. First, verse 14 is perfectly intelligible even if read by itself, and explains the "hypocrisy" that Paul decries in verse 13. The thought of verse 14 is by no means incomplete. Second, even if the thought of verse 14 is incomplete, it does not follow that verse 15 continues Paul's speech to Peter. Paul is writing to the Galatians, not to Peter, and he could very well begin a section by citing what he said to Peter but completes it by directly addressing the Galatians. His intention is not to tell a story, but to make a point through the story, verses 11-14 successfully make his point, leading to a more theological exposition in verses 15-21, whether or not this latter portion belongs to the original speech to Peter.

Another reason offered against closing the speech at the end of verse 14 is the use of "we" in verse 15. Jervis writes, "Before their conversion the Galatians were pagans, so when Paul writes **we who are Jews** he is obviously referring to himself and the Jewish Christians he addressed at Antioch." And on this basis she claims, "This suggests that verse 15 is part of Paul's record of his words to Peter."<sup>15</sup> But the reasoning here is invalid. It is true that because the Galatians were pagans, the words "we who are Jews" cannot include them.

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<sup>14</sup> Fung, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Jervis, 68.



However, this does not necessarily mean that they must refer to Paul, Peter, and the Jews at Antioch in the context of that confrontation. If Paul is no longer speaking to Peter by verse 15, but rather to the Galatians, then "we who are Jews" can refer to Jewish Christians in general, that is, as opposed to Gentiles or Gentile Christians. The verse would make sense either way.

Then, Cole writes, "The opening verses" – by this he means the section that begins with verse 15 – "certainly make better sense if we imagine them as part of an expostulation addressed nominally to Peter, but actually to all the Jewish Christians present, whether members of the local church or strangers from Jerusalem."<sup>16</sup> But why does it make better sense to interpret the section this way? It is unclear if his next statement is intended to offer a reason: "The argument is strictly Jewish; for the moment the Gentile Christians, whether of Antioch or Galatia, have become awed onlookers at a battle of giants."<sup>17</sup>

We raise three questions against the above. First, what does he mean that the argument is "strictly Jewish"? Is there a pagan argument, a Gentile argument, for justification by faith apart from works of law? How can the argument be non-Jewish if the dispute is tied to whether Gentiles should follow Jewish customs? So the statement is misleading if he intends it in this sense. But perhaps he means that the argument is one that occurs strictly *among* Jewish Christians. If so, then we are left with no explanation as to why he thinks that the opening verses of the section make better sense if taken as part of Paul's speech to Peter.

Second, whether he means that the nature of the premises and inferences are Jewish, or that the confrontation occurs among Jewish people, what does this have to do with whether Paul has turned to address the Galatians in verse 15? If he means that the premises and inferences are Jewish, then how about Galatians 3:6-14? There Paul uses one Old Testament verse after another from the eras of Abraham and Moses to make his point to his Gentile audience. And there is also 4:21-31, where Paul makes his point based on the distinctions between Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, and Mount Sinai and the heavenly Jerusalem. As long as they are biblical premises, "Jewish" premises can be applied to Gentiles without modification. But perhaps Cole's point is that the confrontation at Antioch occurred among the Jews. If so, then again this has no direct relevance to whether verse 15 continues Paul's speech to Peter.

The third question concerns a side issue, but nevertheless an important one. Cole says that "for the moment the Gentile Christians, whether Antioch or Galatia, have become awed onlookers at a battle of giants." Now, who are these "giants"? In the previous statement, he asserts that the opening verses of this section make better sense if they are understood as "part of an expostulation addressed nominally to Peter, but actually to all the Jewish Christians present, whether members of the local church or strangers from Jerusalem."

If the "giants" include only Peter and Paul, then when Cole describes this as a "battle," the implication is that Peter resisted, that he took a fighting stance against Paul on the issue.

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<sup>16</sup> Cole, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

But it was more likely a one-sided rebuke. Peter's error was in his hypocrisy, in acting contrary to his own beliefs on the matter. He was confronted with what he believed in the first place. For him to argue with Paul would have been to renounce the gospel, the same message that he believed and preached. This would have placed him under the eternal condemnation specified in Galatians 1:6-9. But there is no evidence that Peter went this far, that is, a complete apostasy from the gospel. Thus from this perspective, there was really no battle.

If the "giants" include "all the Jewish Christians present," then what does that make the Gentile Christians? Were they mere commoners or spiritual dwarfs compared to the Jews? Note that "giants" is Cole's word, not Paul's. And according to Cole, the Gentile Christians "have become awed onlookers" in that incident. What we have here is an evangelical commentator committing the very error that the letter to the Galatians and the ministry of Paul were designed to destroy. It is this undue veneration of the Jews, whether stated or implied, and whether deliberate or unintentional, that subverts the very gospel that eliminates the distinction between Jews and Gentiles where spiritual status is concerned.

There is no indication at all that the Gentile Christians – at least those at Antioch – were awed, or that they were mere onlookers. Such a description could suggest that they were ignorant, helpless, and passive spiritual children, when every indication implies that the church at Antioch was thriving and well-taught (Acts 11:19-30). These Christians were instructed by Paul himself, so that unless he had been teaching them a different gospel, which is unthinkable, we must assume that many or even most of the Antioch Christians could have confronted Peter with the same rebuke that Paul delivered.

Whether Cole intends to include Paul and Peter, or the two apostles plus all the Jewish Christians, by calling them "giants" and by calling the Gentiles "awed onlookers," he betrays a bias that defies the spirit of the gospel. Here it is subtle, but in many traditions, an undue veneration of the nation of Israel, of Jewish Christians, and of so-called Messianic Christianity, is rampantly promoted and practiced. This is especially prominent among dispensationalists, but it is not limited to them. They think that they are doing God a great service, but in reality they have become the enemies of the gospel. Scripture declares that God could raise up children to Abraham even from stones (Matthew 3:9), but the true heirs of the promise are those who believe (Galatians 3:29).

As a Christian, I am more of a Jew – that is, a true Jew (Romans 2:28-29) – than one who is a natural descendant of Abraham but who does not believe in Christ. Neither is one my superior who is both a natural descendant of Abraham and a believer in Christ, for "there is no difference" (Romans 10:12). Thus I refuse to allow anyone to claim any inherent spiritual advantage over me just because he might be a natural descendant of Abraham. One who exalts himself on such a basis is to be despised and humiliated, not congratulated. If he is a true heir of Abraham, he would do the same thing that Abraham did (John 8:39). A true heir is one who has the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16). Abraham is my father, and not the father of a non-Christian Jew. And as a true heir, I exclude such an imposter from the family. This, too, is part of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At any rate, whether it is the case or not, it has not been established that Paul is still speaking to Peter by verse 15. The possibility remains that verse 14 summarizes the essence of what Paul said to Peter, and that verse 15 begins a new section in which Paul directly addresses the Galatians. The objections commonly proposed against this view are unsuccessful.

Some translations do not close the speech until the end of verse 21, thus suggesting that the entire section, from verse 14 to 21, is a quotation, paraphrase, or summary of Paul's speech to Peter (NIV, NASB, NKJV, although the margin notes acknowledge other possibilities).

Against this, Fung writes, "But to regard the whole of vv. 14b-21 as direct discourse or at least as a substantial (though not verbatim) report of what Paul said at Antioch is to come up against the difficulty that v. 17 seems removed from the concrete situation at Antioch (the objection expressed there can hardly have come from Peter)."<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is unlikely that Paul's speech to Peter extends all the way to verse 21 because the objection against the gospel in verse 17 could not have come from Peter, and therefore Paul's response against it could not have been part of the speech. If Fung is correct, then Paul's speech to Peter would end at the end of verse 16 (NLT, YLT).

Now, verse 17 says, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!" This is what the verse says, but we can dismiss Fung's point even without examining it. This is because his argument depends on an unjustified assumption that has no necessary connection with what the verse says. And the assumption is that one person's speech to another, or at least Paul's speech in this case, must carry immediate relevance to the topics and persons in question at every point. So, according to this assumption, unless verse 17 seems to be a response to something that Peter said, it is most likely not part of Paul's speech to Peter. Thus the verse marks the transition between Paul's speech to Peter and Paul's direct address to the Galatians.

It is indeed reasonable to assume that Peter did not raise the objection that Paul answers in verse 17, since the objection challenges the gospel that Peter himself preached – that is, the same message that Paul preached. Here Peter is charged with hypocrisy, not consistency – his behavior contradicted his own conviction. If he had raised the objection in verse 17, it would mean that he had become an enemy of the gospel, and thus his action would have been consistent with an evil profession. But since he was charged with hypocrisy, we may assume that he remained loyal to the true gospel in his profession, and thus the objection in verses 17 could not have originated from him.

However, it is logically invalid to proceed from the above to the conclusion that Paul must no longer be speaking to Peter in verse 17. Again, the former is bridged to the latter by the unjustified assumption that one person's speech to another must carry immediate relevance to the topics or persons in question at every point. But this assumption finds no support in the biblical text or in our everyday speech.

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<sup>18</sup> Fung, 105.

For example, in Romans 9:19, Paul brings up a potential objection against the doctrine of election thus: "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" But the bare mention of this objection tells us nothing about whether his readers in fact said it. In fact, it does nothing to indicate whether anyone who encounters the doctrine would raise it. It is an objection that could come up, but whether it ever does or not is an entirely different matter. Nevertheless, to answer it here adds to the exposition and coherence of the doctrine as Paul has been presenting it in the letter. He tells us that such an objection is without merit because the justice of election is founded on God's absolute right as the Creator of all things (v. 20-24). This point could and should be mentioned and addressed whether or not anyone challenges the doctrine from this perspective.

Likewise, although verse 17 could not be a response to an objection that Peter raised, since Peter could not have raised that objection in the first place, this does nothing to tell us whether it marks a transition between Paul's speech to Peter and his direct address to the Galatians. Thus no successful objection has been offered against any of the three views above regarding where the transition occurs.

What is it then? Perhaps this incident is so appropriate as a launching point for the theological arguments in the rest of the letter that, even if there is such a transition in Paul's mind, one overlaps into the other so smoothly that it is not so obvious. And if it is because of this reason that the transition is not obvious, then neither is it important to discover the precise point where it takes place, that is, if there is such a point at all. Many commentators agree with this, even as they attempt to advance one view over the others.

We will divide our discussion of verses 11-21 into two sections – verses 11-14 and verses 15-21. Although the view that verse 15 marks a new section in which Paul turns from his confrontation at Antioch to directly address the Galatians can make good sense, our discussion is divided in this manner not because we insist on this view as true. Rather, the passage is divided this way here mainly because it contributes to convenience in exposition. Indeed, even if it does not mark a transition in whom Paul addresses, verse 15 marks a transition from a historical narration to a theological argument.<sup>19</sup>

Although debate surrounds some of the details, Paul's account of what happened is straightforward, and the main points are unmistakable. When Peter was at Antioch, at first he joined the Gentile Christians in their meals. But when certain Jews arrived there as well, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, and other Jews followed, including Barnabas. Paul publicly confronted Peter and charged him with hypocrisy.

It is impossible to know why Peter was at Antioch, or when this incident occurred relative to the other events recorded in Scripture. It is perhaps natural to assume that the events in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Also, "If Galatians is viewed as an apologetic letter, 2:14 is seen to follow the practice of the majority of the rhetoricians in bringing the *narratio* to a climax at the point where the issue to be determined begins: Paul's question to Peter reflects precisely the issue in Galatia, namely, that the Judaizers are trying to make Gentiles Christians live like Jews" (Fung, 111).

1:11-2:14 are recounted in their chronological order. But even if this assumption is correct, it offers limited assistance in dating the event in this passage.

For example, some have concluded that if 1:11-2:14 follows a chronological order, then the visit to Jerusalem in 2:1-10 must refer to one that occurred before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. This is because Peter openly defended Paul's understanding of the gospel – that is, the gospel itself – in Acts 15:7-11. Some interpreters find it difficult to accept that Peter could behave as he did in Galatians 2:11-14 *after* making his speech in Acts 15.

However, the reasoning is fallacious, and rests on an assumption about human nature that amounts to a rejection of the biblical doctrine of sin. Hypocrisy was the charge that Paul leveled against Peter, precisely because the latter's behavior contradicted his own profession. So to say that Peter could not have behaved in this manner after he had made such a bold profession of the gospel is worse than to beg the question, but it is an outright rejection of what Paul states in our passage.

Moreover, if it seems that Acts 15 makes any such subsequent compromise of the gospel unthinkable, then what about Acts 9? There God told Peter in a vision, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15). And when Peter visited Cornelius and became his guest, he explicitly acknowledged that he was acting against Jewish customs, but that he was acting according to God's command (v. 28). What Peter did at Antioch contradicted both his profession and behavior in Acts 9.

Besides, there is no need to look at Acts 9 or 15 for the charge of hypocrisy to apply, since our passage mentions that Peter was eating with the Gentiles before the Jews came. Thus his behavior was hypocritical not only relative to some bold profession that he made long before the incident, but even relative to something that he had been saying and doing at Antioch itself.

Thus we cannot date the events in Galatians 2 by the assumption that Peter could not have been as hypocritical as he appears in verses 11-14. The result is that assuming a chronological order for the events in 1:11-2:14 still does not help us ascertain their dates with precision.

As for the significance of eating together, joining someone at the meal table is a sign of fellowship. To refuse meal fellowship then, of course, would signal some sort of distinction or even rejection. For example, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:11, "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. *With such a man do not even eat.*"

Elsewhere Peter was criticized by "the circumcised believers," who said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men *and ate with them*" (Acts 11:3). On that occasion, Peter did not compromise the gospel but gave them an explanation on how it was revealed to him that God would save the Gentiles by the same gospel (v. 4-18). It is significant that

Christ himself was attacked by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and other "sinners" (Matthew 9:10-11).

At Antioch, Peter ate with the Gentiles in the beginning. This was consistent with his profession of the gospel, that both Jews and Gentiles were accepted by God through Christ without the observance of Jewish laws and customs, including circumcision. But then "certain men from James" came, and Peter separated himself from the Gentiles "because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."

We do not know the precise relation that these men had with James, or what they were there to accomplish,<sup>20</sup> only that they disapproved of Peter's practice due to their rejection of the gospel. However, since James affirmed the true gospel (otherwise he would have been a reprobate and false apostle; Galatians 1:6-9), it is certain that whatever relation these men had with him, they did not represent his doctrinal views on the gospel, or how Jews and Gentiles are saved, and how they should conduct themselves as believers (Acts 15:24).

Moreover, we do not know why Peter was afraid of "the circumcision group." If what he felt was more than mere social pressure, then there could have been elements of religious politics behind the situation that we cannot discern from the text. There are theories suggesting that Peter's action resulted from his fear of becoming a stumbling-block to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, or that he even feared for their safety, as his behavior in Antioch (eating with the Gentiles) could have aggravated persecution against the Christians there.

However, even if there is any truth in them, all such speculations are irrelevant to an accurate understanding of Peter's motive. This is because, under divine inspiration, Paul declares that "he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." There was no recognition of any noble reason or selfless concern. There was no excuse for Peter's hypocrisy – "he was clearly in the wrong." And to the extent that they attempt to beautify something that Scripture condemns, all these theories run counter to the truth and spirit of Paul's inspired letter.

Likewise, it is outright sinful for Cole to write, "To Barnabas, no doubt, this was simply a matter of love."<sup>21</sup> "No doubt"? But there is nothing in the text to support this idea. Fear and hypocrisy are the only stated reasons. "A matter of love"? But this suggests a definition of love that is foreign to and subversive of Scripture. Does the Bible define love in a way that calls for disobedience against itself? Any idea of "love" that leads one to become an enemy of the gospel cannot be the kind of love that Scripture teaches. Cole's idea of love here is social and humanistic, and not derived from biblical precept. Besides, where is the love for the Gentile Christians? It seems that Barnabas and Cole have forgotten about them. Thus this is just another attempt to beautify what Scripture condemns as sin and hypocrisy.

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<sup>20</sup> Some theories have been proposed on both questions, of course, but we will not take time to entertain them here.

<sup>21</sup> Cole, 117.

Nevertheless, religious politics often affect even churches that profess the true gospel, and believers are naïve who ignore the political ramifications of their doctrine and behavior. Pressure resulting from ecclesiastical politics is intense even in those institutions that appear to be more pure than the rest. It is not unheard of for some, when they cannot maintain their own views on the basis of Scripture, to use their influence and positions in churches, seminaries, denominations, and ecclesiastical courts to settle theological controversies. Thus Scripture is silenced, and tradition is maintained, along with these individuals as its established defenders.

Christians do not become immune to this pressure by pretending that it is not there; rather, they ought to recognize and understand it, and then in the face of it, persist in faithfulness to biblical doctrine and practice by the wisdom and power that come from the Spirit. And this is what Paul did in this instance. He was not naïve concerning the prominence of Peter, the significance of the men from James, or the political factors associated with the doctrinal controversy, along with its implications in practice and in the fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. But the spiritual ramifications of the situation had to override any political risks.

Under pressure, Peter separated himself from the Gentile Christians. Reversing his prior practice, he withdrew table fellowship from them.<sup>22</sup> His original behavior acknowledged God's full acceptance of Gentiles through their faith in Christ apart from observing Jewish laws and customs. But now his action signaled the opposite, as if the Gentiles remained unclean without observing the Jewish laws and customs, even though they were believers in Christ. And to state the obvious, the reversal was also an insult against the Gentile Christians.

Peter's compromise implied an outright renunciation of the gospel, although this was not his intention, nor was it consistent with his own conviction on the matter, and thus the charge of hypocrisy from Paul (v. 13). Because Peter's offense was public, leading other Jews astray and slighting the entire Gentile population in the church, it was appropriate and necessary for Paul to confront Peter "in front of them all." To publicly humiliate Peter in such a manner also served to restore honor to the Gentile Christians in the church. Paul's drastic reaction reflected the fact that these were not second-class Christians to be insulted and abused by the Jews.

So Paul said to Peter, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" Again, the charge was hypocrisy (v. 13). Peter was not acting according to his own convictions; rather, he himself had ceased to observe Jewish laws and customs, and did not depend on them to find salvation or acceptance with God. He even preached the same gospel that Paul preached. However, when he separated himself from the Gentile Christians, his action implied that they were unclean and unaccepted even though they were already believers in Jesus Christ, but that they had to observe Jewish laws and customs to gain full fellowship.

There are three applications from this passage that we will mention, although we will not take time to develop them.

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<sup>22</sup> This would include both ordinary meals and the Lord's Supper.

First, despite Peter's grievous failure, the authenticity of his apostleship and the inspiration of Scripture are unaffected. It is a fallacy to assume that errors inherently and necessarily pervade every human action so that it is impossible for a perfect sacred text to come about if men have anything to do with it. Divine inspiration ensures the perfection of Scripture. Peter's behavior in this instance was obviously not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, Peter was charged with hypocrisy and not consistency. This means that he never wavered in his profession of the true gospel, and when he was rebuked, he was in fact confronted with what he himself believed and preached. Thus even in this incident, there is maintained a consistent testimony for the gospel message as presented by Paul and the rest of Scripture. In other words, Peter's hypocrisy – that it could be called hypocrisy – reinforces the unity of the apostolic testimony regarding the nature and content of the true gospel.

The second point concerns the effect of hypocrisy. Preachers often incite their people toward holy living by stating that if their practice contradicts their profession, then *no one* would believe the gospel. This is not only untrue and unbiblical, but it is a blasphemous assault against the work of the Holy Spirit. Do we think that our holy actions directly influence men's minds and remove their resistance? No, in every case, the Holy Spirit is the one who acts on the hearts of men. Our holy actions at best provide him with the occasion by which to work. But he can certainly, and in fact does constantly, convert the elect despite the hypocritical behavior of those who profess the faith.

This is not to condone hypocrisy, for God will hold every person accountable, but it is to properly honor the power of the Word and the Spirit, and to remove any excuse from the unregenerate, some of which claim to reject the gospel because of the deplorable examples of believers. Whether someone else is a hypocrite is irrelevant to the nature of the truth or whether one should believe it. Spiritual weaklings will use some else's hypocrisy as an excuse to sin and rebel, but one who is spiritually zealous and mature is instead provoked to defend the truth against apostasy and compromise.

Third, this passage reminds us to maintain and protect full fellowship with every race and class of Christians, even when there is much less at stake than the situation described here. There are those who claim to be victims of racism, but then they segregate themselves in their churches, gatherings, and circles of friendship. They do not take seriously their Christian identity, and the common Christian identity shared by believers of all other races and groups, so that they stand condemned by their prejudice and hypocrisy. Their complaint of racism has become an excuse to extort uncritical sympathy, undeserved respect, and unfair advantages.

As for Paul's purpose for including the passage, although there might be other reasons for mentioning this incident, we will consider it only in its most obvious context as provided by 1:11-12. And in this context, this passage concludes Paul's argument for the authority and independence of his message and ministry. He showed that he not only received Christ's direct revelation and commission, but his message and ministry were also



recognized by the Jerusalem leaders, although he did not require this recognition to proceed.

Now he completes his case by showing that he did not hesitate to confront even Peter – the most prominent of all apostles – when he failed to behave "in line with the truth of the gospel." Thus no one can say that Paul was in any sense inferior or subjugated to the Jerusalem leaders. Neither can anyone claim that they endorsed another gospel, since they agreed with Paul, granting him the right hand of fellowship, and Paul could even correct Peter with its truth, demanding him to act in line with it.

While the passage indeed advances such a purpose, its effects are broader than this. Notice that Paul did not initiate the confrontation purely on the basis of his authority as an apostle, but he opposed Peter "because he was clearly in the wrong," and because he and the other Jews "were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel." But if the truth of the gospel was the basis for such a confrontation, then in principle *any believer* could have opposed Peter and the other Jews in this instance, holding them accountable in the name of Christ.

This restores a proper perspective regarding human authority and association to the controversy. The Judaizers could make false claims about what the Jerusalem leaders believed, or false claims about their association with them; however, in fact all of this had no ultimate significance, for even these leaders must submit to the truth of the gospel as revealed by Christ to the apostle Paul. Of course, the Jerusalem apostles had learned the same gospel from Christ, and it is also this gospel that they preached and practiced. And if any of them deviated from this gospel, it meant only that they had to get back in line with it.

Some bizarre remarks are associated with this passage in the commentaries, and there is some educational value in taking a quick look. We will limit our examples to the ones found in the commentary by Jervis.

Commenting on 2:12, she writes:

One function of this story is to acknowledge the difficulties of a situation in which, even though there was an agreement at Jerusalem (2:1-10), people from Jerusalem who did not accept the law-free gospel for Gentiles have a continuing and formidable influence, even over the likes of the apostle Peter. The "men from James" are a fearsome group. By recounting the story Paul lets the Galatians readers know that their experience of being persuaded by the rival evangelists is neither unprecedented nor shameful.<sup>23</sup>

However, even if it is legitimate to infer these "difficulties" from the incident, there is no indication that it is Paul's intention to "acknowledge" them. We may agree that those of "the circumcision group" were able to apply considerable pressure on Peter, since he separated himself from the Gentiles "because he was afraid" of them. The reason for this

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<sup>23</sup> Jervis, 62.

fear is of no final importance, since Paul's point is that Peter did not act in line with the truth of the gospel, and not whether he had a good reason to do so. The passage is clear that there was no acceptable excuse.

Then, there is the disturbing claim that by recounting the incident with Peter, Paul lets the Galatians know that their apostasy is somehow not shameful. Part of the assumption seems to say, "If some great and prominent person did it, then it is not so shameful that you are also doing it." But there is no indication that this is what Paul intends; rather, every passage in this letter seems to push toward the opposite. And Paul's recounting of the incident has the effect of saying, "This gospel of justification by faith apart from the works of law comes from the revelation of Jesus Christ and carries ultimate authority. When Peter did not act in line with it, even he stood condemned. You Galatians are now participating in the same shameful doctrine that he compromised with because of his fear and hypocrisy."

The idea that other people's sins somehow make ours less shameful is nowhere suggested by the text. But if this is the way that Jervis thinks about sin, then we wonder if she thinks that any sin is shameful at all, since how often do we really commit sins that are "unprecedented"? Rather than a commentary on the implications of the text, her remarks appear to betray only her alarming view on sin.

She continues on the next verse, 2:13:

Peter and those who followed his lead changed their direction out of hypocrisy and fear. Paul's comment that **even Barnabas** was swayed by Peter's response to the Jerusalem Christians may give the Galatians a means of retreating in a dignified fashion from the position they have now put themselves in. The fact that even Barnabas – who along with Paul had convinced the Jerusalem Christians of the validity of Gentile Christianity – could be led astray makes the Galatians' temptation to follow the rival evangelists at least understandable.<sup>24</sup>

The assumption is that someone else's sin – perhaps a greater man, or one who should know better – somehow restores dignity to the sinner and demands understanding from others. There is no indication of this in the text, or in any other part of Scripture.

If Jervis is correct, then against the background of human history, anyone would be able to retreat from any sin "in a dignified fashion," and any sin would be "understandable." But this passage and the rest of the letter, along with Paul's general attitude toward sin in his other writings, all point toward the opposite interpretation. All signs point toward the understanding that what Peter and Barnabas did was entirely hypocritical and shameful, and no sympathy or understanding is extended toward them or the Galatians. Jervis again betrays her dangerous view on sin in these statements, and it is difficult to shake the suspicion that such a skewed interpretation can only come from a spiritually defective mind.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 63.

But there is more. She continues: "The Greek verb *orthopodousin*, translated in the phrase **not acting in line**, gives the impression that Paul was willing to allow some room for error to those who had not had such a direct revelation of the truth of the gospel as he had been privileged with, as long as they were heading on the right course."<sup>25</sup> This claim is doubtful, and it is contrary to the emphasis of the passage. We do detect, however, her repeated attempts to present Paul as one who is soft on sin. Perhaps this reflects her preference as to how sin should be addressed, so that she is determined to portray this letter as much gentler than it is, and in doing so has become quite out of touch with what the text says.

However, the fact is that Paul's letter to the Galatians is very harsh. In it the apostle repeatedly rebukes and condemns his adversaries and those who are swayed by them. Rather than trying to derive the opposite from the text, we should learn that this is exactly the correct thing to do, and the correct tone to take in such a situation.

Today, as we face analogous challenges to justification by faith and other aspects of the gospel, do we confront them as Paul did, or do we adopt the non-Christian style of academic detachment? Do we invoke the divine curse against the enemies of the gospel (Galatians 1:6-9)? Do we call them foolish and bewitched (3:1)? Do we mock and insult them (5:12)? If we are still trying to please men, still trying to sound scholarly and respectable by non-Christian standards, then we are not the servants of Christ (1:10), but a disgrace to his kingdom.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 67.

## **GALATIANS 2:15-21**

**"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.**

**"If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"**

Regardless of where Paul's speech to Peter concludes, it is verse 15 that marks the transition from historical narrative to theological argument. Until this point he has been defending the original and authority of his message and ministry (1:11-12), and only now does he begin to engage the actual doctrine that is at the center of the controversy. Of course, the first readers were aware of this context and background as they read the previous sections of the letter. On the other hand, we were able to read them with the topic of justification by faith in mind because Paul now explicitly introduces it.

The current passage begins the theological portion of this letter, and both summarizes and assumes several key points in Paul's theology. The main assertion here is that no one can be saved by observing the law or depending on his own works; rather, the only way that one is saved is by faith in Jesus Christ apart from the law or works. This qualification at the end is essential and necessary, since the opposition here is not preaching salvation apart from Christ, but a faith in Christ that fails to exclude, and in fact requires, obedience to Jewish laws and customs (including circumcision) in order to attain full acceptance with God. Paul shows that this is in reality an attack on and rejection of Christ and the gospel.

It is important to keep in mind that Paul's opponents do not say that no one should believe in Christ, or that they should rely on their own works instead of Christ. Rather, the trouble is in their insistence that "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5) in addition to believing in Christ. They are telling Gentile Christians, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).

So as Paul begins verse 15, he is not speaking to or about people who profess to be non-Christians. It is assumed that Christ is the awaited Messiah. Of course, Paul could present the case for this (Acts 9:22, 17:3, 18:5, 28:23), but the center of the current controversy rests on this other issue.

Since in verses 15 and 16 Paul appears to be speaking to or about<sup>26</sup> those who understand that "a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ," it would seem that the Jews he has in mind primarily refer to professing Jewish Christians, such as the likes of Peter and Barnabas. And so, whether or not verse 15 continues Paul's speech to Peter, some connection is maintained to the Antioch incident as a whole and what he says in verse 14 .

About these Jews, Paul himself being one of them, he says although they possess the law, including the rite of circumcision,<sup>27</sup> they know that no one is justified before God by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. He does not say that no one is justified by *just* observing the law, but that he needs Christ to make up for his shortcoming. Rather, he says that no one can be justified by observing the law at all.

Here Paul sets up a contrast between justification by law and justification by faith. Now, if a man could be justified by observing any system of law, it would have to be the law of Moses. Unlike other systems of law, religion, or personal ethic, it is an extensive revelation from God. Thus if no man can be justified before God by observing the law of Moses, then *a fortiori* a person cannot be justified by observing any other system of law or ethic.<sup>28</sup>

This in turn means that we can infer a broader contrast than the immediate context presents. That is, the contrast is not only against justification by observing the law of Moses, but by observing any law or ethic (Romans 9:11-12, 16; Titus 3:5). In other words, the contrast is between justification by works and justification by faith. Although it is important to keep in mind that the "law" in this letter mainly refers to Jewish laws and customs, it is legitimate and necessary to make this wider application of the principle. More will be said in support of this in a moment.

This is something that the Gentiles need to hear in the context of this controversy. They are already believers in Jesus Christ, but now the Judaizers tell them that they must also observe Jewish laws and customs, including circumcision. Paul points out that even those who are Jews by birth must themselves turn from reliance on their own works to faith in Jesus Christ in order to be justified. He writes, "by observing the law no one will be justified." This could be an allusion to Psalm 143:2, offering one indication that the law itself testifies that no one can stand righteous before God if judged according to his own effort to follow the law.

As Paul writes elsewhere, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the

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<sup>26</sup> Recall the earlier refutation against the claim that the "we" (referring to Jews) implies that Paul is necessarily still speaking *to* Peter in verse 15.

<sup>27</sup> It is in contrast to *this* standard – that is, one that cannot justify in the first place – that the Gentiles are called "sinners" here. Of course the Gentiles are sinners in a more general sense as well, as are the Jews, but the word is used here relative to this standard.

<sup>28</sup> See Fung 114, and James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10 (Zondervan, 1976), 449.

Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:20-22). The law is not a plan that has failed, to be replaced by faith. Rather, it has never been its function to justify anyone at all, only that by it "we become conscious of sin," and "so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Romans 3:19). The Law and the Prophets themselves testify to a righteousness from God that comes "apart from law," but it "comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Then in verse 21, Paul makes the statement, "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" The idea here is not that Christ's death would be "useless" (NCV), as in ineffectual, but that it would be unnecessary (NLT: "there was no need"). Again, keep in mind that Paul is dealing with professing Christians, so that he is not responding to a direct attack against Christ. The necessity of Christ's work is here assumed, and once assumed, it is evident that it is incompatible with the idea that righteousness could be gained through the law. If righteousness could be gained through the law, then one must deny the necessity of Christ's work. In other words, if men could achieve righteousness before God by their own effort to observe the law, then it would have been unnecessary for Christ to come and die for them in order to win that which they could have obtained by their own effort.

Either Christ's death is insufficient or unnecessary, or it is impossible to obtain righteousness through the law. To say this another way, one who preaches righteousness through the law is compelled to deny the sufficiency and necessity of Christ's redemptive work. And by definition, to deny the sufficiency and necessity of Christ makes one a non-Christian. Thus it follows that the Judaizers were in reality non-Christians. They preached a non-gospel, an anti-Christian message. Therefore, having already believed on the gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by Paul, the Galatians had no reason to accept the Judaizers' message.

There is a broader principle that stands behind verse 21. The current controversy concerns works and faith, law and Christ, and that is the contrast presented in the verse. The established assumption here is the necessity of Christ's death. But this assumption excludes not only the possibility of attaining righteousness through the law; rather, if it is held constant, it must exclude every other method of attaining righteousness. This is because if there is any other way of attaining righteousness, Christ's death would have been unnecessary. If salvation can come any other way, then Christ's sacrifice was unnecessary. But since Christ's death was indeed necessary to save men, this means that it is impossible to attain righteousness through any other means. Therefore, it follows that verse 21 is a condemnation against, not only the attempt to attain righteousness through observing Jewish laws and customs, but any other system of law, ethic, philosophy, or religion.

So a man is justified not by law (or works), but by faith. But many scholars are inaccurate when it comes to the idea of faith. For example, Jervis writes, "For Paul the power of the Christian life resides not in the intellectual assent to truth, nor in personal rigor, nor even in the simple power of confidence in God, but in recognizing that one has become

incorporated into Christ."<sup>29</sup> We may agree with and then discard the part about "personal rigor" for our present purpose. However, what about "the intellectual assent to truth" and "the simple power of confidence in God"? If the question is where "the power of the Christian life resides," then we may agree that assent and confidence carry no inherent power to sustain the Christian life.

But then her statement is misleading, since she proceeds to assert that this power "resides...in recognizing that one has become incorporated into Christ." How is this different from an "intellectual assent to truth"? All she does here is to specify the truth to which one gives assent, the truth that "one has become incorporated into Christ." The only way she can make a distinction here is if she intends for the act of "recognizing that" to be a non-intellectual (non-mental) recognition or assent. If this is what she means, then she has failed to defend the idea that it is possible to give non-intellectual recognition to a proposition, or to explain the kind of recognition she intends to convey.

More likely, however, she is merely following the unbiblical and annoying habit of many Christian believers and scholars to avoid exalting intellectual assent in the Christian life. She thinks that this is what she is supposed to say. Yet intellectualism is unavoidable, since the truth is that faith is mental assent, no matter how repugnant this sounds to an anti-intellectual or mystical mindset. Thus she turns from advocating an "intellectual assent" or a "simple confidence" to "recognizing that" a proposition about one's relation with Christ is true. So what do we have? Intellectual assent to truth.

In addition, if we are going to be strict about it, the whole idea conveyed by her statement is false in the first place. The question is where "the power of the Christian life resides," particularly in the theology of Paul. She denies it to assent and confidence, but grants it to recognition. We have shown that she fails to distinguish these terms, but that all three of these mean the same thing. For the sake of both accuracy and simplicity, we may identify them with what Paul calls faith.

But now, does "the power of the Christian life" reside in a person's *faith* in one thing or another, or does it rather reside in a proper object (of faith)? What should we mean when we assert the doctrine of "justification by faith"? I answer this question in my *Commentary on Philippians* as follows:

Justification is by faith not in the sense that you can save yourself by your faith; rather, the doctrine teaches that you can do nothing to save yourself, but that you must totally depend on someone else to save you. Therefore, the doctrine is teaching justification not by faith *as such* or by itself, but it is teaching that justification is *by Christ* alone. It is Christ who saves you, and not faith itself. Faith has a role because it is Christ who saves you by means of giving you faith in him (Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 12:2).

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<sup>29</sup> Jervis, 74.

Further, the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not imply that we are justified before God because we managed to work up enough faith in and by ourselves to believe in Christ, which is impossible in the first place. Rather, the doctrine contrasts faith against works – which is why it is meaningful to speak of justification *by faith* in Christ rather than only justification *by Christ* – emphasizing that we are justified by God through faith apart from works. This faith is itself not a work — that is, not a work of man, but a work of God in man.

Faith is a gift of God purchased by Christ for all those whom God has chosen for salvation. It is a gift even though it has been purchased by our Mediator because it is God who sovereignly decreed to save us through this Mediator in the first place. It is God who has sovereignly chosen those whom he would save by his grace through Christ, so that all of salvation is a gift of God — it is a sovereign gift of God, unmerited by man, that at the same time fully satisfies divine justice, since it has been merited by Christ. Thus salvation is from the grace of God alone, through the work of Christ alone, and by means of faith alone (that is, in contrast to works).

Therefore, when discussing the doctrine of justification by faith, we must not portray faith as a condition for salvation that God requires from us, as if we could produce faith in and of ourselves prior to regeneration and apart from the Spirit's power. So, although it is correct to speak of faith as our necessary response to the gospel, this "response" of faith is in fact one of the very things that Christ's atonement purchased for his elect, and that God bestows upon his chosen ones by his Spirit. In other words, God is the one who produces this response of faith in his elect. This is another reason why it is incorrect to speak of faith as an inherent power.

When Scripture says that salvation is by faith and not by works, it is not throwing out works just to make faith a condition that man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation from God, although this is precisely how the doctrine is frequently but mistakenly portrayed, either by explicit statements or by implication. Faith is not a good work or a condition for salvation that God requires from us before he would do anything to save us; instead, God has already decreed and performed all that is necessary to secure the salvation of his chosen ones, and faith in the gospel is precisely one of those things that he has secured for the elect by the work of Christ, and that he sovereignly produces in their minds when he commands them to believe and summons them to himself by the gospel. There is therefore no place for boasting. Salvation comes from God through Christ alone. We cannot even boast about our faith, since it is a sovereign gift of God, merited by Christ for the elect.

Again, when we refer to justification *by faith*, we are emphasizing the contrast between faith and works. But works do not occur independently of persons – a work is performed by someone. Therefore, to seek to be justified by our works is not to depend on works *as such*, but it is in fact an attempt to *save ourselves by ourselves*. Likewise, just as there is no work without a subject, there is no faith without an object. We are not saved by faith *as such*, as if we can just "believe" with no object in view, or as if we can believe in just anything and be saved, just as long as we believe. No, rather, our faith must be directed to the proper object, and it is this object of faith that saves us.



This object, of course, is Christ. And since faith is intellectual assent to true propositions, when we say we have faith in "Christ," this object is represented by "the gospel," which is a set of propositions about the person and work of Christ.<sup>30</sup> And however simple or limited in its presentation, this is theology. This also means that theology is necessary if we are going to have faith at all. And herein is the relation between salvation and theology – we do not say that one must become a professional or academic theologian to be saved, but we must say that no one can be saved without believing the correct theology, and one believes the correct theology because God causes him to do so by divine grace and power, according to the eternal decree and election.

Our short passage by itself contains and implies several essential things that one must believe about Christ.

Regarding his person, Paul states that Christ is "the Son of God," but he was also "crucified." In these two ideas are contained the doctrines of the divinity and the humanity of Christ. That he is "the Son" assumes the biblical doctrine of the Trinity (although the entire teaching cannot be deduced from this alone), and that there is a filial relationship between the Son and the Father. That he could be crucified assumes that he took upon himself a human body, so that he appeared on the earth not merely as a phantom or apparition. His suffering included genuine physical pain and death.

Because Scripture reveals these two truths concerning Christ's person, it is necessary to understand and affirm both of them. By definition, anyone who rejects either doctrine cannot be a Christian. And by definition, any message that neglects either doctrine cannot be the Christian gospel. Such a man is not saved, and such a message cannot save. Thus the proper objects of faith, in terms of doctrines and propositions to be affirmed, include the Trinity of God, the divinity of Christ, and the humanity of Christ. Even if we go no further, it is obvious that all non-Christian theologies, philosophies, religions (including Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on), and all cults and heresies claiming a Christian basis (such as Catholicism, Islam, Baha'ism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and so on) convey no saving message and will doom all its adherents to eternal condemnation in hell.

Regarding his work, Paul writes that Christ "loved me and gave himself for me." In the Gospel of John, we read, "For God *so loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Likewise, the Son "loved" and therefore "gave himself." Paul does not say Christ "*owed* me and gave himself for me," but that he "*loved* me and gave himself for me." The Father decreed redemption out of divine love, and the Son executed the decree also out of love. Man initiated nothing, and nothing depended on his worth or merit. In other words, salvation is of divine decree and grace, not human desire and effort.

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<sup>30</sup> This would include the background necessary to understand the person and work of Christ, such as the doctrines of God, creation, man, and the fall of man.

Because he "loved me," Paul writes, Christ "gave himself for me." In context, the giving of himself refers to Christ's crucifixion and death,<sup>31</sup> which from the rest of Scripture we understand to be a sacrificial and substitutionary atonement. The contrast between the impossibility of being "justified by observing the law" and the necessity of being "justified...by faith in Jesus Christ" suggests the doctrine of the imputation of righteousness from Christ to the Christians, a teaching even more obviously asserted elsewhere in Scripture. And this doctrine or proposition is also part of the object that true faith affirms.

Our point, then, is that justification by faith stands as a proper contrast against justification by works, and thus the term is accurate and meaningful when the background against which it is used is understood and assumed. Yet faith *itself* saves no one, but it is the object of faith that saves *through* the faith that this object generates in the person. And this faith's object is "Christ," which as an object of intellectual assent consists of true propositions regarding his person and his work, including the Trinity of God, the divinity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, sovereign grace, divine election, the substitutionary atonement, and the imputation of righteousness to the chosen ones, whose salvation are revealed through the faith that God provides and generates in them. Justification *by faith* is an accurate and meaningful term as long as it represents justification *by Christ*, who saves us apart from our works but by giving us faith in him.

As mentioned, we agree with commentators that verse 17 does not represent an objection that Peter leveled against Paul. This is because the objection amounts to a rejection of the very gospel that Peter himself preached and believed, but he is here charged with hypocrisy and not consistency. That is, Peter behaved in a way that contradicted the true gospel, which means that he continued to affirm the true gospel. The objection is posed as a rhetorical question, which Paul proceeds to answer himself.

If the word "sinners" is used in the same sense as it is in verse 15, then it is not mainly referring to sinners in a broad sense, but in the narrower sense, as in those who do not follow Jewish laws and customs. Thus the objection is that if Christ instructs men to stop observing the law, then it seems to follow that Christ encourages them to sin. The doctrine of justification by faith, therefore, permits Gentiles to remain as "sinners," and even Jews to become the same.

An extension of this objection would be the charge that justification by faith promotes antinomianism, or lawlessness, and licentiousness. In other words, the charge is that if we preach that a man is made righteous before God solely because of the work of Christ, then this appears to permit, if not encourage, a complete abandonment of all human effort to live in a holy and moral manner. It would seem that the man could continue in sin, if not become even more sinful, and still be saved.

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<sup>31</sup> He writes, "I have been *crucified with Christ*" in verse 20, and in verse 21, "if righteousness could be gained through the law, *Christ died* for nothing!"

Ryken says, "This is a fair question,"<sup>32</sup> but Paul seems to think otherwise when he answers with an indignant "Absolutely not!" We must never compliment any question or objection that "sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and that challenges God's rationality or righteousness. Cursed be all non-Christian standards of social propriety and rules of interaction, if they forbid us to reprimand unbelief, when appropriate, with fierceness and authority. Our first concern is not to appear polite and respectable by the world's standard, but to represent our God in righteousness and with all boldness.

Elsewhere when Paul anticipates an objection to the doctrine of election, he does not say, "This is a good question" or even "I am glad you asked that." Instead, he writes, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Romans 9:20). Because God is perfectly rational and righteous, and the very standard and definition of such, all questions and objections *against* what God has revealed are necessarily irrational and unrighteous. There is no such thing as a fair, good, or rational challenge against Christianity. Rather, all such questions and objections must necessarily be stupid and sinful. This does not mean that we avoid answering them – the point is that we must not honor that which is stupid and sinful because we cater to a non-Christian standard for conversation and debate.

Paul proceeds, then, to address this ridiculous, irrational, and irreverent question. Again, the objection is whether we make Christ a promoter of sin when we abandon the works of the law as a way to be justified before God, so that we become "sinners" by the standards of Jewish laws and customs, if not godless and lawless sinners altogether (v. 17). But Paul replies that it is to rebuild what he has destroyed – that is, the legalistic way of life, and to seek justification by observing the law – that would prove him to be a lawbreaker (v. 18). "The real sinner is the one who is justified and then returns to the law. Ironically, that person is actually a *lawbreaker*. People under the law are more precisely described as lawbreakers than as law-keepers!"<sup>33</sup> This is because such a person cannot in fact keep the law, and also because by reinstating the law, he sins by renouncing and working against the gospel of Christ.<sup>34</sup>

He continues, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God" (v. 19). Paul realized through the law that he was a sinner and that he was unable to justify himself by observing the law. So he learned through the law that he must abandon the law as the way to obtain justification before God. One function of the law, therefore, is to point *away* from itself as the way to justification – it was never given for justification (3:21) – partly by causing those under it to despair of their own efforts to follow it. Thus Paul writes, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (3:24; also 4:1-5). Paul died to the law as a way of life, as a way of justification, or obtaining righteousness with God.

There is another sense in which Paul died to the law through the law that is probably even more meaningful in the context of this passage (v. 15-21). The law's demand for perfect

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<sup>32</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (P & R Publishing Company, 2005), 69.

<sup>33</sup> Life Application Bible Commentary, *Galatians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: 1994), 74.

<sup>34</sup> Fung, 122. Ryken, 71.

obedience is accompanied by the penalty of death for failing to follow it. Thus when Paul failed to render perfect obedience to the law, even a single infraction earned for him the ultimate punishment. However, as he will proceed to announce, the curse of the law was nailed to the cross with Christ as he, though without sin, took upon himself the punishment against sinners. As Paul has been chosen by God and united with Christ through faith, as far as the law was concerned, when Christ was crucified, Paul was crucified with him. And because the death penalty of the law has already been carried out against Paul in Christ, he has died to the law and severed his former obligation to it (Romans 7:2-4). Now there is nothing else the law can do against him.<sup>35</sup> And thus through the law, he died to the law.

However, Paul did not remain dead. As the penalty of sin was carried out and divine justice was fully satisfied, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and in him, all the chosen ones as well. Thus Paul writes, "For through the law I died to the law *so that I might live for God.*" The Christian message, therefore, does not make "sinners" out of people, whether in the legal sense or the ethical and moral sense; rather, it enables believers to "live for God."

This identification with Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection is often subsumed under the doctrine of our "union with Christ." While this expression is convenient in some ways, it has at times framed discussions on "in Christ" passages such that theologians have been forced to give a satisfactory account of our relationship with Christ, not in terms of the biblical verses, but in terms of this "union" that we have with Christ. Failing this, the relationship has been relegated to a "mystical" union. But to consider our identification with Christ – or this union, if you will – as mystical is often premature, if not false altogether.

Rather, once we cease to think of this "in Christ" relationship in almost physical or spatial terms, the mystical aspects are lessened, if not eliminated. It is a relationship in which our federal head represents his chosen ones (those whom God has placed "in" him) in his humiliation, obedience, crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification (Romans 5:12-19). And this relationship is maintained, not by a co-occupation of space, whether in the spatial or mystical sense, but by faith, which is a sovereign gift from God. By this same relationship, Christ is said to be "in" us, that is, directing and enabling us to live for God in holiness, boldness, and obedience by his Spirit (1 John 3:24). Let us not call mystical what is rather easily understood and believed.

Paul says that he is dead to the law, having been crucified in Christ, and now he no longer lives, but it is Christ who lives in him. We must not take this and run away from the passage so that we can make a mystery out of it, because Paul has not finished speaking about this. He continues, "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God." This statement offers at least two important implications for the doctrine of our so-called union with Christ, or to the doctrine of salvation in general.

First, the "self" and the body have not been dissolved into nothing, or even into "Christ" in a sense that makes them disappear. Paul's self and body are still present, living, and relevant. His relationship to his former way of living has so changed that he is now said to

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<sup>35</sup> Ryken, 72-73.

be dead to it. The present passage addresses how a person can obtain forensic justification before God, or more generally, salvation. However, if this so-called union with Christ results in a destruction of the personality, or so complete a dissolution into the divine that the self is no longer said to remain as a distinct entity, then the person in fact does not receive justification or salvation – he is simply annihilated. If this is what "salvation" means, then God in fact saves no one. But God performs what he promises through the gospel – he justifies and saves anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, Paul's relationship with Christ is now such that he is said to be "in" Christ and Christ is said to be "in" him. Yet there is nothing mystical, at least in this passage, as he describes the nature of this relationship as living "by faith in the Son of God." There is no reference to a spatial or ontological interpenetration of beings, but a spiritual relationship of faith in Christ. Paul is referring to "a complete change in his way of looking at all things, a 'reorientation of thought', to use modern jargon, which involves a total change of life."<sup>36</sup> Christ has replaced the law as his reference and motivation behind all his thinking and behavior.

Thus to answer the concern raised in verse 17, the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ does not promote sin or make us sinners. We have been crucified in Christ, and having died to the law, we have been raised to new life in him, so that we now live for God and pursue holiness by his life and power.

Rick Joyner, who claims to be a prophet, published a book in which he recounts a vision he had received about "the final quest" of the church – its journey, growth, triumph, and so on.<sup>37</sup> It pictures the church as a group of warriors marching against the enemies of Christ. At one stage in the story, as this army climbs a mountain on its way to the destination, it reaches a plateau called "Galatians 2:20," and the interpretation is that the church will not succeed in its mission until *Christians* finally *attain* to the advanced spirituality described in that verse.

This false prophecy reflects a common misuse of the verse, which describes the condition of anyone who has been justified in Christ through faith, rather than an advanced stage of spiritual maturity to be attained by one who is already a believer. That is, unless a person has been crucified with Christ, and unless Christ lives in him, he is not just an immature Christian, but he is not a Christian at all. The irony is that there is in fact some truth to Joyner's claim, although in a completely different sense than his alleged revelation intends. And that is the fact that the way for the church to move forward today is for professing believers who are not truly believers to become converted.

For a long time the church has been advocating false doctrines, employing false methodologies, and refraining from harsh reprimands and excommunications. Because of this massive failure, millions of false converts have gathered in our congregations. The only corrective is to reverse these three tendencies – to preach sound doctrines, enforce proper methodologies, and cleanse the church by confronting wickedness and expelling the

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<sup>36</sup> Cole, 124.

<sup>37</sup> Rick Joyner, *The Final Quest* (MorningStar Publications, 1996).

unrepentant. Then a greater part of the church will have attained to Galatians 2:20 – that is, they will be Christians.

Perhaps the verse has been so easily misused because of its profound expressions and its elevated concepts, so that although they have already been converted, even true believers feel as if they have not yet attained to it. Even for Christians, its Christ-centered emphasis presents a sharp contrast against our self-centered thinking and behavior. Nevertheless, we cannot use our diverse and fickle feelings or our struggles in sanctification as controlling factors in biblical interpretation. Galatians 2:20 describes a person who has been justified in Christ through faith – that is, it is a description of any Christian at all.

One commentator remarks that if Paul had ended his letter here, he would have already made his point.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, he has answered his opponents regarding his personal history, his relationship with the Jerusalem leaders and their position on the doctrine at issue, his role in the Antioch incident, and the theological reasons for the gospel of justification by divine grace through faith in Christ as opposed to a doctrine of justification by human effort through the works of the law. Relative to the arguments of the Judaizers, it is not *necessary* for Paul to say more – he has already won by this point. Yet God inspired the apostle to provide additional clarifications and arguments. In any case, this is the reason for our extensive exposition on this first major portion of the letter. Subsequent passages will expand on the foundation now established, reinforcing Paul's doctrine from several perspectives.

This is as good a place as any to make one point about the use of this doctrine of justification by faith in Christian apologetics. It is sometimes argued that Christianity is the only religion that does not advocate in some way salvation by one's own effort and good works. It is the only message of salvation that insists on a total dependence on divine grace and mercy, and faith in a sacrificial atonement. And this is somehow supposed to indicate that Christianity is a superior worldview or even the only true religion.

However, although uniqueness (and uniqueness on *this* issue) might have its place in some contexts, it is hardly a convincing argument here. For one, unless additional and convincing arguments are supplied, its uniqueness does not necessarily indicate a positive, but it can very well mean that it is an inferior worldview or religion, so peculiar and problematic that it occupies a place by itself below all other alternatives.

Moreover, the uniqueness of Christianity on this matter, if it is indeed unique, can be quickly destroyed by anyone who invents a religion that mimics its doctrines of atonement and justification. Of course, we can argue that, unless it copies Christianity completely, in which case it *is* Christianity, such a religion will have insuperable problems. But then we are already defending Christianity apart from its alleged uniqueness on this matter of justification.

Likewise, it begs the question to argue that a religion invented by mere men will always advocate salvation by works, so that the Christian gospel of justification by faith suggests

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<sup>38</sup> Cole, 126.

its divine origin. Unless additional and convincing arguments are supplied, the fact that Christianity advocates justification by faith could very well mean that it is the only system that cannot save anyone even before we examine other doctrines in the system. Just because Christianity insists on salvation by grace *in itself* does not make it a true religion, let alone the only true religion.

Of course, the above is not to be taken as a denial of the truth of any part of the Christian faith, or even its uniqueness. Rather, in the interest of promoting sound arguments and superior apologetics, it presents a challenge against the suggestion that Christianity's uniqueness or emphasis on grace as opposed to works somehow proves that it is true. But truth is not vindicated by mere comparison. Christianity is not true *because* it teaches justification by faith – this reverses the proper order of reasoning. Rather, justification by faith in Christ is true *because* Christianity is true, and we show that Christianity alone is true on the basis of some other arguments.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

## GALATIANS 3:1-5

**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?**

The word translated "foolish" here is not *mōros* (as in "moron"), but *anoētos*. Christian writers are in the habit of denying that Scripture would call some people "foolish" in the sense of "stupid," or mentally deficient and defective. It is customary to understand the word in a moral sense, whatever that means. And in denying that both words mean stupid, commentators usually make themselves appear quite foolish.

On Galatians 3:1, John MacArthur writes, "This refers not to lack of intelligence, but to lack of obedience."<sup>40</sup> But when Paul applies the same word to the Galatians in 3:3, MacArthur says that the apostle is "incredulous at how easily the Galatians had been duped."<sup>41</sup> Which is it? Is Paul somehow referring to "lack of obedience" by the word, or "easily...duped"? Prejudice forces MacArthur to choose the former (3:1), exegesis compels him to select the latter (3:3).

Another commentator writes, "The Greek word does not mean that they were mentally deficient; rather *anoetos* suggests that the behavior of people who are intelligent yet are not using that intelligence to perceive the truth."<sup>42</sup> First, even if the word literally means that one is not using his intelligence, it does not necessarily suggest that this person is intelligent. Then, the commentator proceeds to say that the Galatians are "illogical...inconsistent, contradictory, nonsensical."<sup>43</sup> What is the difference between such people and stupid people? And he adds, "He was questioning, not their intelligence, but their lack of discernment."<sup>44</sup> But again, what is the difference?

Ryken is more honest with the passage. He writes, "Paul was upset...here he practically splutters with indignation. And rightly so.... As far as Paul was able to tell, the Galatians were guilty of sheer spiritual stupidity. J. B. Phillips paraphrases him to say: 'O you dear

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<sup>40</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 1664.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1665.

<sup>42</sup> Life Application, 82. Some commentators appeal to Luke 24:25, Romans 1:14, 1 Timothy 6:9, and Titus 3:3, where the same word is used. But it begs the question to insist that the contexts of these verses give the word a moral sense. It could be that both the moral and mental aspects are specified, or even, to reverse their use of these verses, the moral terms should be given an intellectual interpretation.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.



idiots of Galatia...surely you can't be so idiotic!"<sup>45</sup> The only correct way to deal with the text is to acknowledge that this is in part a harsh and angry letter, and that when the apostle calls his readers stupid, he means stupid.

The idea that there is a moral stupidity (whatever that means) that is sharply distinguishable from an intellectual stupidity is inexplicable. Although man's mental deficiency has a spiritual origin or basis – thus the term "the noetic effects *of sin*" – it cannot be reduced to a purely moral defect to the exclusion of an actual retardation of the intellect. A good tree bears good fruit because it is a good tree, and a bad tree bears bad fruit because it is a bad tree. So just as people affirm and perform wicked things because they are wicked, they affirm and perform stupid things because they are stupid. This is imperative to safeguarding the biblical doctrine of sin, and thus also the biblical doctrine of salvation, or the complete gospel message. Christ is both our spiritual/moral and intellectual savior.

Among several other expressions that he uses, Paul calls the unbelievers "morons" (Gr. *mōros*), and those who follow heresies "idiots" (Gr. *anoētos*, or mindless, foolish), as he does here. Instead of following the Bible's example in using such invectives under similar contexts, many Christians have adopted a foreign standard of social interaction. They have been deceived into thinking that biblical teaching somehow commends detached academic language and a formal professionalism in our expressions, so that perhaps without knowing what they are doing, they even join the world in condemning the apostle's approach, or at least condemn him indirectly by persecuting those who follow his example.

There is also a double standard in how they react to someone who models the inspired characters in Scripture. Church figures who had achieved hero status are often exempt from their criticisms, although they have done the same thing. If Calvin says it, it is orthodoxy; if I say the same thing, it is heresy. If Luther employs invectives, it is vigilance; if I employ invectives, it is arrogance. Of course, these people are respector of persons, and they are hypocrites. Some would go as far as to fault Calvin, Luther, and the like for their practice, although they would still find some excuse for them, such as the customs of their day. However, they would still have to deal with all the harsh expressions in Scripture against unbelief and heresy.

Morally speaking, to uncritically follow current non-Christian practice is to betray Scripture's teachings and examples. It is sinful to suggest that the use of invectives is wrong when defending biblical doctrine and practice, because such a suggestion would condemn Scripture itself. Practically speaking, to adopt a non-Christian standard is to unnecessarily limit our rhetorical options in performing polemics, and to exclude strategies that often render our expositions and arguments more explicit, precise, forceful, and effective. In any case, although it is not always appropriate to employ invectives in polemics, we have no obligation to follow the non-Christian standard, and we must not yield when unthinking and hypocritical Christians criticize the practice.

Some criticisms are especially unintelligent. I recently received a rebuff from a Christian for applying the word "moron" to a non-Christian, as the Bible does. In it he says "a good

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<sup>45</sup> Ryken, 81-82.

rule to remember" is that "it takes one to know one." But this principle is problematic for several reasons.

First, by "it takes one to know one," this Christian intends to suggest that if I call someone a moron, then I must be one myself to be able to recognize him as one. Thus he claims that by this principle he recognizes me as a moron, but then by the same principle, "it takes one to know one" (and he knows me as one), he must be a moron himself. So all I hear from his objection is that he is calling himself a moron, and I am mystified as to how this is supposed to discourage me from applying the word to a non-Christian as the Bible does.

Second, after insisting that he is himself a moron, by this principle he is also calling the faithful and significant Christians of previous centuries all the derogatory names that they have applied toward those who disbelieved and disobeyed sound doctrine. This is because name-calling modeled after the biblical examples had always been the custom of the Church Fathers and the Reformers. From Augustine to Calvin, and even Matthew Henry and Charles Spurgeon, harsh but accurate invectives had always been applied to the opponents of the gospel. But by the principle, "it takes one to know one," this Christian condemns this whole host of God's servants with all the labels that they have applied toward unbelief and rebellion, as if these servants of God were in fact the enemies of Christ.

Third, even if we yield to the Christian's second implication, that all these significant figures in church history were just as much the children of hell as those that they denounced, surely no Christian should say the same about the inspired characters of Scripture. Yet the prophets and the apostles almost unceasingly called some in their audience sinners, fools, idolaters, adulterers, liars, whores, dogs, and many other things. By the principle "it takes one to know one," this Christian asserts that the prophets and the apostles were also all of these things. By this point, if we take this Christian seriously – if *he* takes this principle seriously – we must conclude that it is impossible for him to affirm the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

As if that is not enough, the fourth implication is still more severe. Our Lord Jesus himself called many people harsh and derogatory names, using a wide range of invectives to denounce them. He speaks of sinners, adulterers, idolaters, liars, and demons. He rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith and understanding. He called the Pharisees vipers, murderers, hypocrites, and even the children of hell. By the principle "it takes one to know one," our Christian is by implication calling the Lord himself all these things – that he is a demon, a murderer, a hypocrite, even a child of hell.

In connection with the above, we could make a fifth point out of the fact that the principle also implies that, when God the Father calls someone a sinner, this makes God himself a sinner, since "it takes one to know one." Moreover, a sixth point can be developed out of a reverse application of the principle. That is, when I call the Father "God," this means that I am God myself, for "it takes one to know one." Now if the principle is qualified to eliminate all these undesirable, and probably unintended, implications, then it is pretty much useless and a waste of my time. This Christian might as well just call me a moron

without any justification and without making any connection to the fact that I applied the term to a non-Christian. But of course, "it takes one to know one."

If I base my use of invectives on biblical precepts and examples, as I repeatedly assert and demonstrate, then this Christian must either refute any alleged scriptural support and connection between my practice and what we find in Scripture, or he is applying his principle to me fully aware of the connection that I claim with Scripture. Thus he is without excuse. By implication, his rebuke against me is the equivalent of a renunciation of Scripture and of Christ.

Thus if we take his point seriously – if *he* takes his point seriously – by his rebuke against me he must be considered for immediate excommunication from the church. By no means do I now assert that this person is indeed an unbeliever. The point is that my practice has an irrefutable biblical and historical foundation, and to attack it merely shows the objector as one who stands squarely against Scripture. Moreover, his use of the cliché and irrational principle "it takes one to know one" reflects a common practice among Christians of using non-Christian standards to regulate all aspects of their theology and practice, even to the point of condemning those who follow Scripture rather than the world.

Rather than a champion of biblical love and kindness, if his use of the principle by which he rebukes me is taken to its devastating logical conclusion, then we must insist that he is not a Christian at all, but an unbeliever and a blasphemer. Unless he has never read much of the Bible or many of the prominent Christian works throughout history, our most charitable conclusion is that he employs a double standard against me, and proves himself to be a self-righteous hypocrite. And what we find today among Christians is a cliché system of theology and ethics that is not very different from what the non-Christians believe. This is, inevitably, the pathetic condition of those who wield an unbiblical standard to judge a biblical doctrine, practice, or ministry.

In the same rebuke, he also admonishes me with the statement, "It is easy to sling it but it is not nice to receive it." But is he prepared to say this to the likes of Augustine, Athanasius, Luther, Calvin, and so on? Does he dare to say the same to Jeremiah, to Paul, and even to the Lord Jesus? No, like a hypocrite, he says it only to me because I am one who has not achieved hero status in his mind, and therefore I am not exempt from his non-Christian standard.

Now, if I am following a biblical practice, applying the same words that Scripture uses to the same kind of people that it applies these words, why do I have to "receive" the same? Why is there even a question as to whether it is easy to "sling it" or "receive it"? What does that have to do with anything? How is it relevant? In this context, the admonition makes no sense. It is just another cliché from one who has been indoctrinated by the world instead of by biblical teachings and examples, and who now takes upon himself to rebuke me when I rebel against the anti-biblical standard, seemingly in the hope that I will get back in line with the accepted non-Christian practice and attitude. There is *no chance* that I will comply.

Long ago I had to make a decision. I could cater to the non-Christian standard to make my speech and writing sound academic and professional to people. Or, I could forsake worldly respectability and follow the examples of the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus. The former would make me a pitiful drone, a polite hypocrite who offends fewer people but by implication blasphemes even the Lord himself. The latter would make me a faithful minister of Christ, scorned by professing believers and hated by the unbelievers – that is, if I can even tell them apart – but the reward is divine light and thunder in my proclamation of the word of God, and the Father's approval that comes from obedience through the Lord Jesus Christ. The options were clear. The consequences were obvious. The decision was easy. "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."<sup>46</sup>

The Galatians' attraction to the false gospel is so irrational that Paul describes them as "bewitched," as if they have come under a spell. The question posed here ("Who has bewitched you?") is rhetorical. It is not as if Paul does not know or if he is interested in discovering the one responsible for leading his readers astray. And it does not necessarily mean that someone has wielded demonic powers on the Galatians in the process of advancing the false gospel. Rather, "bewitched" corresponds to "foolish," and accentuates the irrational nature of the Galatians' error, especially when considered against the nature of the gospel of Christ, and the force and clarity with which Paul had delivered it to them when they were converted.

He writes, "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified." Of course, the Galatians were not present at the crucifixion, but Paul announced the event and its significance to them through his preaching. He preached with such force and clarity that the event was placarded before their very eyes, and it was as if they had become personal witnesses to the crucifixion. Or as Calvin writes, "By this he suggests that the actual sight of Christ's death could not have affected them more than his preaching."<sup>47</sup> It is in this sense that all believers are witnesses to the Lord Jesus – not as eyewitnesses, but as those who have received the testimony of the Holy Spirit about the life and work of Christ through the testimony of Scripture.

Paul preached to the Galatians "Jesus Christ crucified." And of course he explained to them the significance of the event, that by it Christ had satisfied divine justice, having endured upon himself the wrath of God deserved by the sins of men. As Paul states in 2:21, unless Christ "died for nothing," which is inconceivable, this work of redemption excludes the idea that "righteousness could be gained through the law," and by implication, any other system of belief or ethic.

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<sup>46</sup> For more on this topic, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, Commentary on Ephesians, Captive to Reason*; Douglas Wilson, *The Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking* (Canon Press, 2003); Robert A. Morey, "And God Mocked Them" (audio); and James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons From the Imprecatory Psalms* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, trans. T. H. L. Parker, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 47.

Since this one truth so clearly excludes the corresponding error, since this true gospel so obviously precludes the false, to Paul it is astoundingly stupid for the Galatians to be led astray by the Judaizers. Somehow they have lost their focus on the truth of Jesus Christ crucified, and are therefore succumbing to error. It is this truth that would now break the spell of heresy upon the Galatians, and the same truth would break the spell of heresy among our congregations today, especially when it comes to the doctrine of justification. If Christ was crucified for our sins, and if his death was not for nothing, then this makes impossible the recent errors that have been advanced on the matter of justification.

Now although the expression might place emphasis on the crucifixion, by "Christ crucified," Paul does not refer only to the crucifixion and the death of Christ to the exclusion of all else, but it seems to be a shorthand that represents the entire gospel. To illustrate, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." But this does not mean that he refused to speak to them about the resurrection!

In fact, later in the same letter when he reminds his readers of "the gospel I preached to you" (15:1), he says he preached "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (15:3-8). In other words, he related to them the full account of Christ's redemptive work from both the historical and theological perspectives – not just that "Christ died," but that he "died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and also that "he was raised on the third day."

Paul challenges the Galatians with a series of rhetorical questions. Jervis again appears completely out of touch with the text. She writes, "He asks them how they received the Spirit. Paul presents his question respectfully: he wishes, he says, **to learn** from the Galatians. Having just called them 'foolish,' this is a remarkable rhetorical move. Paul indicates that he is on their side and is committed to them despite their actions at the moment."<sup>48</sup> Remarkable indeed. There is no indication that he "presents his question respectfully." The questions are obviously challenges against the Galatians, and not polite inquiries.

As if verse 1 is not enough to indicate his attitude, in verse 3 he will say again, "Are you so foolish?" Paul is not showing respect, but he is displaying disdain and impatience. He asks "to learn" from the Galatians, not in the sense that they could teach him, but in the same sense as we sometimes sarcastically say, "Well, maybe you can enlighten me about this?" As a rhetorical question, the meaning here is that we think the other person is wrong. We do not think that he can enlighten us, and we demand him to prove otherwise. Jervis seems determined to force a positive interpretation from the text, but Paul's harsh attitude against his readers and the false teachers is so reinforced with clarity and repetition that such an attempt cannot succeed.

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<sup>48</sup> Jervis, 79.

The questions are harsh and direct. As a rhetorical strategy, they rebuke the Galatians for their foolishness, and require them to rationally think through their present disposition against the background of what they have learned before. Whereas Paul has shown that the Judaizers' doctrine cannot be true in light of the apostle's knowledge and history, now he shows that the heresy in question is inconsistent with the Galatians' own knowledge and history. The effect is to accentuate the irrational and erroneous nature of the doctrine, and the foolishness for accepting it.

Rhetorical questions are used for effect, to elicit thought, to express sarcasm, and to get the readers to acknowledge the obvious. Because the expected answers are usually obvious, rhetorical questions are also implicit assertions of the asker's position on the subject. Therefore, as we consider Paul's questions to the Galatians, we will also learn more about his reasoning on the matter of justification.

He asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" The answer is obvious. We know that the letter is a defense of justification by faith, and so the latter is suggested by the question. Also, the Gentile Galatians were not observing the law before Paul came to them, and when Paul came, he did not preach to them that they could be justified by observing the law. The question, then, is also an implicit assertion: "You received the Spirit *not* by observing the law, *but* by believing the gospel."

Ryken would like to think that Paul's statement rules out any kind of "second blessing" theology when it comes to the reception of the Spirit. He writes:

Some Christians teach that is a gift Christians receive sometime *after* they come to Christ. This "second blessing" suggests that Christians come in two varieties: with and without the Spirit. What Paul says here obviously rules this idea out. The gift of the Spirit is received by the same faith that lays hold of Christ. The works, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit belong to the very beginning of the Christian life. Thus the whole Christian life is lived in the Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

But Paul's statement in fact does nothing to rule out the "second blessing" doctrine, whether or not this doctrine is correct. Pentecostals and Charismatics do not teach that a Christian is completely without the Spirit before he receives this second blessing, but they acknowledge that without the Spirit, one cannot be a Christian in the first place. Whether it is described as a baptism, filling, or outpouring, in the second blessing, the Spirit is given in a distinct measure or manner as an endowment of power.

As far as I am aware, no representative Pentecostal or Charismatic theologian claims that a Christian is completely without the Spirit before he receives this second blessing. Anyone who teaches this is an anomaly. From a Pentecostal or Charismatic perspective, Paul could be referring to either the initial conversion of the Galatians, or a second blessing that came after. Nothing in the text necessarily rules this out. Again, this does not mean that the

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<sup>49</sup> Ryken, 88.

doctrine is correct, but it means that this verse does not carry the relevance required for Ryken's application.

"Are you so foolish?" (v. 3). Paul calls them stupid again. What are the Galatians doing that is so stupid? He asks, "After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" Verse 2 reminds them that they have received the Spirit by faith and not by effort. It is stupid for them to think otherwise or to forget this. And their stupidity continues when they think that what they received by faith, they can now maintain or carry through to perfection by their own effort. As one commentator notes, Paul "highlight[s] how completely inconsistent it was to receive a gift and then try to earn it."<sup>50</sup>

The word translated "human effort" here is "flesh." Thus Paul is presenting two contrasts in these verses: faith versus work, and spirit versus flesh. Faith corresponds to the spirit, that which is of God and spiritual. Work corresponds to the flesh, that which is of man and carnal, and unable to attain righteousness or to sustain righteousness to perfection. Faith, then, is needed not only at conversion, but it is to be a way of life, so that it is also by faith that we shall continue in sanctification and attain perfection by the Spirit. It is foolish to think otherwise.

The word translated "suffered" in verse 4 can mean simply "experienced." It is possible that the Galatians have endured persecution for their conversion, so that Paul would be asking them if they have suffered for the sake of Christ, only to turn away from the gospel. However, "experienced" seems more consistent with the context. If this is the case, Paul would be asking them if they have experienced the presence and the power of the Spirit both at their conversion and at the present for nothing. Since rhetorical questions are implicit assertions, to say "Have you suffered so much for nothing?" might appear to be an assertion that they have indeed suffered for nothing, especially in the context of the other questions in the series. Thus Paul adds, "if it really was for nothing?" to indicate he is not yet asserting that the Galatians have completely turned away from the gospel.

Verse 5 could be treated with verse 2, as some commentators do,<sup>51</sup> because it repeats the contrast between work and faith. But I prefer to follow Paul's order, since this verse clenches the argument that he advances in verses 3 and 4, and that is in turn founded on verses 1 and 2. Just as justification is attained by faith and not law, sanctification is sustained and perfected by faith and not law.

Like verse 2, it also refers to the blessing of the Spirit, although this time Paul puts it in terms of God giving the Spirit instead of the Galatians receiving the Spirit. He also adds the working of miracles and speaks in the present tense, thus calling attention to God's current activities and blessings among the Galatians. Does God do these things "because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" Again, a rhetorical question is an implicit assertion, actively advancing one's position while eliciting thought and agreement from the audience. In other words, by this Paul asserts that God gives the Spirit

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<sup>50</sup> Life Application, 86.

<sup>51</sup> Fung, 130.

and works miracles among them not because they observe the law, but because they believe his word.

This passage is often treated as an argument from experience, that is, as if Paul appeals to the Galatians' experience in order to prove a theological position. We will consider arguments from experience in general, and then what it means to this passage in particular.

Elsewhere I have explained the problems associated with *ordinary* arguments from experience, and the related problems of induction and sensation. Among other things, an experience does not compel necessary inferences – that is, one can always infer an infinite number of conclusions from an experience, so that a simple argument from experience never proves anything. Rather, an experience must be interpreted by a certain standard, and once the standard is known, the truth that the experience is supposed to yield is already known, and thus rendering the experience useless as a basis for proof. In addition, induction and sensation can never yield any knowledge, so that all ordinary arguments from experience are in fact invalid.<sup>52</sup>

However, as I have also explained, statements from or concerning experiences in Scripture are true by divine inspiration, so that they are not subject to the criticisms against ordinary arguments from experience. Also, since they are true by divine inspiration, in reality they are not really arguments from experience, but arguments from revelation *about* experiences. The epistemological foundation in these cases is revelation, not sensation, induction, or experience. Therefore, even if Paul appeals to the Galatians' experience in this passage, it does not follow that we can appeal to our own experience *in the same way* to assert or refute a theological position today. This is because Paul's understanding of the Galatians' experience is founded on divine inspiration, and not from their experience itself. Thus it remains that it is not experience that produces theology, but revelation that interprets experience.

That said, what does the passage actually say? Does any portion of it in fact appeal to experience? In what way does it do so? First, notice that nothing in verses 1, 3, and 4 truly appeals to experience in a way that is relevant to our present concern. In verse 1, Paul calls the Galatians stupid, and reminds them of his preaching. In verse 3, Paul again calls them stupid – that is, it is stupid to begin in the Spirit but continue in the flesh. This does not appeal to experience to advance a theological position. Verse 4 suggests that for the Galatians to forsake the way of faith would mean that they have experienced all that they did "for nothing." Again, no theological position is advanced on the basis of experience. A spiritual truth is implied, but not inferred. That is, to turn away from the gospel would render their previous experience "for nothing," but this is not inferred from their experience, but rather applied to it.

Only verses 2 and 5 resemble an appeal to experience, but even then we must pay attention to what Paul says and what he does not say. In verse 2 he refers to the Galatians' receiving of the Spirit, and in verse 5 the same thing but from God's perspective, the giving of the

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<sup>52</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Captive to Reason, The Ministry of the Word, and Prayer and Revelation*.



Spirit. Apart from the rest of these verses, whether this is an appeal to experience, and what is just as important, *what kind* of an appeal to experience this is, depend on the meaning of to "receive the Spirit."

This is an appeal to experience only if it refers to something that the Galatians could recognize as a distinct event in their consciousness or perception. Otherwise, even if there was a distinct experience, there could be no appeal to it in the process of argument. So if Paul is referring to the Galatians' initial conversion that is not associated with some special event, feeling, or any other indication that sets itself apart in their consciousness, it cannot be said that he is appealing to experience to make an argument.

Now, verse 5 does add the working of miracles, and this is the closest and clearest reference to an experience in this passage. Some commentators think that Paul has in mind the inner working of God's power *within* the Galatians. But I tend to agree with others that this is more likely a reference to God's outward display of power *among* them, even if the former is not excluded. So, if there is any appeal to experience at all, the clearest point as to where this is done is here, and as we have seen, perhaps *only* here.

This possible argument from experience should be qualified by at least two considerations:

First, to repeat what we said earlier, an apostolic assertion concerning experience is different from an extra-biblical argument from experience. The latter cannot overcome the logical problems associated with induction and sensation, and is therefore fallacious. But an apostle writes out of divine inspiration, so that the epistemological foundation of what seems to be an appeal to experience is in fact revelation, and not the experience itself.

Second, verses 2 and 5 are expressed as rhetorical questions, which as we have also mentioned before, are in fact implicit assertions. In other words, we could paraphrase Paul as saying, "You did not receive the Spirit by observing the law, but by believing what you heard," and "God does not give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, but because you believe what you heard." Once the questions are rephrased according to their meaning in this manner, any indication of an appeal to experience disappears. Paul is not deriving a doctrine from their experience, but applying a doctrine to their experience, reminding them of the association between the true Christian gospel and true Christian experience, and that the false gospel has made no contribution to it. If this is the meaning of the two verses, then why does Paul use rhetorical questions? He uses them for the same reason that we use them, that is, for effect.

Therefore, it is illegitimate to use this passage to endorse arguments from experience in general, or the idea that theology is founded on experience, or even the idea that there are two sources for theological construction – revelation and experience. Except in a general or indirect sense, the passage is also irrelevant in a discussion of *the importance* of Christian "experience" (in its various meanings as used in discussions on spirituality). Paul is arguing for the way of faith in contrast to the way of law, and not the importance of experiencing one thing or another.

This is not to minimize experience as such, but to limit the passage to its proper applications. In fact, we must insist that "experience" is *absolutely necessary* in a Christian's life – but only in the sense that God must apply his blessings to a person in order for him to benefit from them. In this sense, one must have a personal "experience" of God and his promises. A person must actually receive regeneration, faith, and so on to be a Christian, and to be able to commune with God and live in holiness. But "experience" in this sense has nothing to do with subjective intuitions, feelings, or encounters, whether or not these things might at times accompany the kind of experience that is necessary, as in the actual application of redemption and its blessings.

A related issue is how we are to refute false experiences. Those who wish to avoid directly dealing with specific claims about spiritual experiences could simply adopt a strong cessationism. However, this doctrine is not supported by anything remotely resembling a biblical case. In his *Sola Scriptura and the Revelatory Gifts*,<sup>53</sup> Don Codling points out the obvious when he shows that cessationism simply does not follow from *Sola Scriptura* or the finality of biblical revelation. The connection has been assumed by force and prejudice, not by logic.

This means that when someone claims to have heard from God, or claims to have seen a vision of Christ or an angel, it is biblically and logically fallacious to dismiss the claim by saying that the event could not have happened, that this type of experience is impossible today, for the simple reason that these things *are* indeed still possible, whether or not they actually occur. Because there is no biblical or logical refutation to the claim *itself*, one cannot respond, "You have not heard from God, and you have not seen anything. You imagined all of it."

Instead, we must examine the content of the alleged experience. For example, consider how we addressed Rick Joyner's vision in connection with Galatians 2:20. We understand that it was a false vision not because visions no longer occur, but because the vision assumes or presents a false interpretation of Scripture. Did Joyner see a vision? Perhaps he did, but whatever he saw could not be considered a revelation from God, and is therefore unreliable. Rather, Joyner should have received official church discipline for his false claim.

Moreover, it is fallacious and misleading to use modern excess as the sole or even main reference point to refute the very idea of continuing charismatic powers and practices. Those we label Pentecostals and Charismatics have no exclusive rights to the manifestations of the Spirit. So whether or not they continue, or how they should be implemented and regulated in the church, have no direct relevance to the Pentecostals and Charismatics. It is dishonest to imply that if we affirm the continuation of the spiritual gifts, then we will become like them. No, if they are wrong, then they are wrong. What does that have to do with us? What does that have to do with other people who affirm the continuation of the gifts? Rather, we will still need to derive a theology of the charismatic powers from Scripture.

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<sup>53</sup> Don Codling, *Sola Scriptura and the Revelatory Gifts* (Sentinel Press, 2005).

## **GALATIANS 3:6-9**

**Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.<sup>54</sup>**

Paul's answer to what he asks the Galatians in 3:2 (also 3:5) is obvious, because it is a rhetorical question, which is tantamount to an implicit assertion. Thus Paul asserts that the Galatians received the Spirit by believing what they heard, and not by observing the law. Now he offers an extended biblical and theological argument to show that "the promise of the Spirit" (3:14) is received by faith.

Boice suggests that the argument proceeds in an alternating fashion from 3:6 to as far as 4:7.<sup>55</sup> The current passage (3:6-9) shows that Abraham was justified by faith, and that all who would be justified before God would follow the same pattern. The next passage (3:10-14) is a negative counterpart to this, showing that it is impossible for a person to be justified by observing the law.<sup>56</sup> The other sections are 3:15-18, 3:19-22, 3:23-29, and 4:1-7, but we will not follow these divisions in our exposition.

There is much that we can derive from this passage, but the main point is simple and obvious, especially given our discussions on the previous passages. So that there is no need to repeat what I have said elsewhere, I assume that the reader already understands the idea of imputed righteousness,<sup>57</sup> and the reference to Abraham illustrates it is in this sense that a person is justified before God through faith in Christ. Some of the points that Paul mentions here are presented in expanded form, or with more detailed explanations, in his letter to the Romans.

The Jews equated the descendants of Abraham with the children of God (John 8:31-47). It is likely the Judaizers had asserted that it was necessary for the Gentiles to become children of Abraham in order to be saved, and that in order to become the children of Abraham, it was necessary for them to receive circumcision, the physical seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14). So it is possible that Paul now refers to the case of Abraham not only to construct a positive exposition of justification by faith, but also to counter the Judaizer's misuse of covenant history.

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<sup>54</sup> For grammatical reasons, verse 6 could be attached to the end of verse 5, instead of standing as the introduction to a new paragraph (ESV). See Fung, 128.

<sup>55</sup> Boice, 455-456.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>57</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians*, and *Commentary on Philippians*.

He first clarifies how Abraham was justified by appealing to Genesis 15:6, which says, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." He does not use this to press his point at length in this letter, although he might have already expounded on it when he previously taught the Galatians, so that this serves as a reminder of something more extensive. In any case, it is sufficient to make his point – Scripture says that Abraham was righteous because of faith and not works.

When he appeals to the verse again in his letter to the Romans, he does expand on this point and reveals some of the reasoning behind his use of it. In light of our discussion, the main ideas in the following verses are obvious:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. (Romans 4:1-11a)

Here the appeal to Genesis 15:6 appears in verse 3, in answer to the question of "What does the Scripture say?" about the matter of what Abraham "discovered in this matter" of justification by law versus faith. He was not justified by his works (v. 2), but by faith (v. 3). Notice that this already parallels his use of Genesis 15:6 in the letter to the Galatians, for the bare text of the latter does not go further than this, although he does go further here in Romans.

The nature of this "faith" is clarified when the principle is expressed thus: "the man who does not work but *trusts God who justifies the wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness" (v. 5). And the reason why God could justify the wicked in accord with his own justice is stated in verse 25: "[Christ] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

Verses 6-8 cite David's testimony concerning "the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works." Verse 9 asks, "Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?" – a question that is also considered in the letter to the Galatians. To answer this question, he reminds the readers of his earlier appeal to Genesis 15:6, and says, "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness." And then he relates this verse from Genesis to the question of circumcision: "Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?" (v. 10). The answer is, "It was not after, but before!"

This could explain Paul's reasoning behind his use of Genesis in Galatians 3:6. The rite of circumcision is instituted in Genesis 17:9-14, but by that time Abraham was already justified before God. And this justification, Scripture says, occurred through his faith in God's promise, that is, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Therefore, Paul writes in verse 11, circumcision was for Abraham "a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." He was righteous "by faith" and "while he was still uncircumcised." The circumcision was a sign and seal of it.

This deflates the Judaizers' argument, since Abraham himself was not justified according to the manner that they now impose upon the Galatians. The true children of Abraham are not his natural descendants, but those who follow the faith of Abraham, and in this manner of receiving justification, that is, by faith. As Jesus says, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did" (John 8:39). In accordance with this reasoning, Paul writes in verse 7, "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

We return to Romans 4 for additional explanation. Again, 4:3 appeals to Genesis 15:6, showing that Abraham was justified by faith, and that this happened before he was circumcised. Paul applies this principle of justification by faith to the Gentiles: "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (4:23-24).

Because Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision, "he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them" (Romans 4:11b). For the benefit of the circumcised Jews, he adds, "And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (v. 12).

He is the father of the circumcised, but not if they are only circumcised, and not because they are circumcised. He is their father only if they "also walk in the footsteps of faith" of he who was justified *before* he was circumcised, and thus apart from circumcision. In other words, Abraham is the father of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised, that is, all those who follow his trust in God are justified apart from circumcision. Even those who are not his natural descendants are considered his children "in the sight of God" (Romans

4:17), and those who disbelieve are disowned and cast out. Natural descent is completely useless and irrelevant when it comes to possessing a right standing before God (Matthew 3:9).

The biblical record concerning Abraham shows that justification by faith is not a New Testament invention, but that in fact, faith has always been the *only* way to receive righteousness from God. Here Paul writes that the Scripture preached the gospel to Abraham, saying, "All nations will be blessed through you" (v. 8). This appears to be a conflation of Genesis 12:3, 18:18, and 22:18. In this context, the blessing relates to how God justified Abraham through faith, and that since the principle is extended through Abraham to all nations, that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith" as well. "So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (v. 9).

Therefore, God has always intended to save the Gentiles since the beginning, and faith has always been the only way. Paul even calls God's promise to Abraham "the gospel" in verse 8. Elsewhere I have shown that the Old Testament believers possessed substantial information regarding the person and work of Christ. For example, 1 Peter 1:10-12 tells us that the Spirit had predicted "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." This would, of course, include the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, as well as the effects of such for the salvation of the chosen ones. As the prophets inquired about "the time and circumstances" of these events, the Spirit revealed to them that their prophecies refer to Peter's own generation. Again, this is a substantial amount of information regarding the person and work of Christ (also see Luke 24:27, 44).

Abraham was justified by faith. But this faith was not a general trust in God, or in particular promises that are unrelated to the object of our own faith. No, Abraham was justified by faith *in the gospel*, even in Christ. Many Christian writers not only fail to emphasize this crucial point, but sometimes even contradict it. Abraham was saved by *the* gospel, and the *same* gospel that we believe, with two differences – he had less information than we do, and he believed before the coming of Christ, while we believe after his coming.

As Ryken writes, "What God said to Abraham was nothing less than a proclamation of the gospel. . . . Indeed, it goes all the way back to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), who were the first to hear it."<sup>58</sup> In order to preserve the biblical idea that there has always been only one way of salvation through one gospel, it is necessary to insist on this – that God himself preached Christ to Adam and Eve, not by name, but it was the same message. They were to trust God's promise and place their hope on this Savior who was to come.

One commentator wrote that Abraham was the "first" who was justified by faith, and thus opened the way for the application of this principle for the rest of humanity. This is blatantly false, unless it is suggested by this that no human individual received salvation before Abraham – since there has only been one way and one gospel all along. But we know that people were saved before Abraham, also by faith (Hebrews 11:4-7), and that the gospel was proclaimed as soon as sin entered the world (Genesis 3:15), in fact, even before God declared his curse on Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:16-19).

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<sup>58</sup> Ryken, 101.

As for Abraham, Ryken continues, "The gospel is the good news about God forgiving sins and granting eternal life. These are the very things Abraham believed. He did not know Jesus Christ by name, but he trusted him nonetheless."<sup>59</sup> This last sentence is exactly right, and a pleasant exception to the ambiguous or erroneous views espoused by some commentators and theologians on this matter. And finally, considering Abraham's behavior on Mount Moriah, where God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17-19), Ryken adds, "He had faith, in other words, in both the atonement and the resurrection."<sup>60</sup>

The Scripture is personified in verse 8 and is interchangeable with God himself (also Romans 9:17): "The Scripture foresaw...and announced the gospel." This carries great significance for both the doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, and the doctrine of justification by faith. Of course, the Scripture, as in the Bible or the book, is not identified with God in the ontological sense. But when the intellectual contents of the Scripture is considered, then there is no difference between what it says and what God says, since the Scripture *is* what God says (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

From this perspective, not only could the Scripture be personified as if it is interchangeable with God, but it *should* be thus personified. Unless ontology is in view, in which case a distinction must be made, we are to freely and habitually refer to Scripture as if we are referring to God, and to speak of the two as if they are interchangeable. Any dread or hesitation in doing this betrays an insincere or incomplete commitment to the divine inspiration of Scripture, and dishonors the God who speaks powerfully through it without error or contamination.

The implication for the doctrine of justification by faith is straightforward. Because this doctrine is what the Scripture teaches, and because what Scripture says is what God says, it follows that God is the one who insists on the doctrine of justification by faith. It is taught and supported by God's own authority and wisdom, and cannot be faulted. Anyone who affirms or teaches something different becomes an enemy, not only of Paul, but of God. Naturally, such a person would be eternally condemned (Galatians 1:6-9). The same verdict is pronounced against anyone who opposes the doctrine today.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 102.

## **GALATIANS 3:10-14**

**All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.**

Paul has established that Abraham himself was justified by faith apart from works, apart from circumcision, and that through him was formally instituted the principle of justification by faith, although faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ had always been the only way to salvation since the time of Adam. He now proceeds to directly attack the idea that anyone could be justified who relies on observing the law. He does so by making a series of assertions along with scriptural texts that correspond to them.

Verse 10 asserts, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse." The biblical basis for this comes from Deuteronomy 27:26, which Paul cites here as, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Anyone who fails to observe the whole law – anyone who breaks even one of its requirements – is a lawbreaker, and therefore comes under the divine curse.

Since, according to Paul's reasoning, no one is able to obey the law in all its details throughout his whole life (Romans 3:23), no one who relies on observing the law for justification can succeed. Or, as he states here, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse." As Ryken explains, "The problem with the law, then, is not the law; the problem with the law is our sin. Since we cannot keep the law, the law cannot bless us. All it can do is curse us, placing us under the condemnation of divine wrath."<sup>61</sup>

Verse 11 asserts, "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law." The previous verse already makes clear that all who rely on the law will not be justified, but will come under a curse instead. Verse 11 is not redundant, since although the assertion is stated negatively, the scriptural citation is a positive affirmation of justification by faith, that living by faith is the way of the righteous (Habakkuk 2:4).

In other words, no one is justified before God by the law, not only because all who rely on the law are under a curse, but also because Scripture itself teaches that the righteous will live by faith. Note the alternate translation, "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (RSV; also REB and GNT), and Paul indeed applies the verse as if this is what it says.<sup>62</sup> In

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>62</sup> Fung, 143-145.



any case, the law does not only condemn all those who rely on it for justification, but it points to faith as the way.<sup>63</sup>

Then, verse 12 asserts, "The law is not based on faith." Rather, according to Leviticus 18:5, "The man who does these things will live by them." A person who attempts to become justified by law must rely on his own works – this way is not based on faith, and it cannot be supplemented by faith. The man is "stuck" with law, and the two ways of justification exclude each other. It is impossible to rely on both faith and law, that is, on both Christ and oneself.

Note that faith and law in themselves do not exclude each other – God instituted both of them. Rather, we are saying that the two ways of justification exclude each other. If one relies on observing the law for justification, then there is no place for faith; if one relies on faith for justification, then there is no place for reliance on observing the law. Now since those who rely on the works of law must "live by them," and since they can never achieve perfect obedience to the law, all those who seek justification in this matter are doomed to eternal condemnation. Since the way of faith is the way of reliance on Christ for salvation, those who rely on observing the law instead are cut off from faith, and cut off from Christ (Galatians 5:4).

Paul has laid out several points from the law itself. First, the law brings a curse. Second, the law itself teaches faith. And third, faith and law exclude each other. The upshot of this argument is that the law itself teaches that it is impossible to be justified by the works of law, but the only way to justification before God is faith.

Now Paul abruptly turns to the object of this faith (v. 13), for as we have noted, justification by faith does not denote justification by faith *as such*, but it means to have faith in the proper object. This object of faith, he writes, is the person and work of Christ, who "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Paul tells us not only who does it (Christ) and what he does (redeemed us from the curse), but also how he does it – that is, "by becoming a curse for us."

This is the language of substitution. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law – the punishment for our wickedness and disobedience – by taking it upon himself, and by suffering its deathblow. Paul connects this understanding of the work of Christ with the manner of his death, citing Deuteronomy 21:23 as confirmation that he bore the curse as he hung on the cross. This leaves no question, then, as to the nature of the work of Christ, and the purpose of the crucifixion. His work was that of a substitutionary atonement – he died for sinners to save them from divine condemnation. This idea is also taught in the law, for example, in the instructions regarding the scapegoat in Leviticus 16.

The context is justification, but Paul writes that by faith we receive "the promise of the Spirit" (v. 14), and so either equates or overlaps one with the other. Elsewhere, the apostle insists, "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). Paul, of course, has been answering the rhetorical question that he posed in

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<sup>63</sup> Boice, 459.

3:2 (also 3:5): "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?"

Again, a statement like the one in 3:14 cannot be used to refute Pentecostal and Charismatic theology, such as the "second blessing" doctrine. Whether the doctrine is true or false, we must not endorse unsound arguments against it. Theologians who attempt to use this verse as a basis for refutation typically fail to establish even its relevance.

The verse teaches that we receive by faith, but many Charismatics also teach that we receive this second blessing by faith. The verse teaches that the Spirit is available to all who would believe, but this is what many Charismatics affirm about the second blessing, that it is available to all who would believe. If it is argued that the context practically equates reception of the Spirit to justification before God, many Charismatics could also agree. They themselves insist that one receives the Holy Spirit at conversion in a sense and in a measure – they do not deny Romans 8:9 – only that there is a blessing or experience of the Holy Spirit distinct from conversion through which one receives empowerment for ministry and witness.

Whether or not the "second blessing" doctrine is correct, verse 14 says nothing to contradict this, and the doctrine says nothing that would contradict verse 14. Given this doctrine, the verse is either taken as referring to the reception of the Spirit in connection with justification or conversion *without* also referring to the "second blessing" of the Holy Spirit, or it could be taken as an inclusive reference stating that both the blessings of conversion and empowerment are promised to all the children of Abraham, who receive both by faith. Therefore, if this is a false doctrine, it must be refuted on a basis other than Galatians 3:14, since *as a refutation*, the verse is irrelevant.

## **GALATIANS 3:15-18**

**Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.**

The reasons suggested as to why Paul mentions certain points, or why he chooses to argue for these points the way he does, are often partly based on speculation. For example, when he puts the emphasis on Abraham, it could be that he is answering some of the opposing arguments, those that appeal to Abraham to establish justification by works, law, or circumcision. However, there is no way to be sure of this, and it could be that Paul is merely raising the point to present his own case against the Judaizers. In any case, whether he is answering actual or hypothetical arguments, or whether he is making his own case, we know that he is indeed facing opposition, that is, Judaizers who would sway the Galatians from the true gospel.

So far Paul has shown that Abraham himself was justified by faith apart from circumcision and the law, since he was justified before circumcision and the law. And he has also demonstrated from the law itself that it is impossible to be justified by observing the law, that the law itself points to faith as the way to be justified, and that the basis and object of this faith is the substitutionary atonement performed by Christ.

But now one may object, although Abraham was justified by faith before the law, it could be that we are now to be justified by the law precisely because it came later, and thus superceding the principle of justification by faith exemplified in Abraham. It is relatively unimportant as to whether this is an actual objection that Paul is answering, or whether it is merely a possible objection. He proceeds to answer it in our passage, arguing that the formal introduction of the law did not annul or add to the principle of justification by faith.

Verse 15 refers to "a human covenant" as an illustration. It is uncertain which legal system is assumed here – Roman, Greek, or Jewish. The question does not ultimately affect our understanding of the passage, since Paul's intention is clear enough, and under any one of these legal systems, there comes a point in which a covenant is no longer subject to annulment or addition after some official action or event (such the death of a testator).

Paul is referring to a covenant "that has been duly established." After that "no one can set aside or add to" it. And "so it is in this case" of Abraham, the law, and justification by faith. Whatever he has in mind closely corresponds to a "last will and testament," through which

an inheritance is left to the beneficiary. As the rest of the passage suggests, the covenant made with Abraham is very much like this. It is not so much an agreement as it is a declaration of what God promises to perform. One writer observes, "It is a grant rather than a bargain."<sup>64</sup>

This is clearly seen in the way God ratified his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Following the customs of the day, animals were cut apart and the halves arranged opposite each other. The parties were to pass through the pieces, and so the covenant would be ratified in blood. However, in making his covenant with Abraham, God passed between the pieces alone. Again, this suggests that this covenant is not so much an agreement as it is a declaration of what God promises to perform. The fulfillment of the promises does not depend on both parties playing their parts, since Abraham had no part – the covenant does not depend on him, but only on God's ability and faithfulness to perform what he has promised.

The word translated "seed" in verse 16 could in fact be taken in either a singular or collective sense, or both. Consider the English word "family," which appears to be singular, but could refer to a collective that consists of multiple individuals.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Paul himself assumes a collective sense for the word in several other places (Romans 4:16-18, 9:6-8), so it is probably a mistake to think that he is here making an argument that turns on the singular sense of the word.

Rather, he is expounding on the promise made to Abraham, pointing to Christ as the true heir of the inheritance. Several verses later (v. 26-29), he will conclude that believers are thus heirs of the promise through Christ, that is, by being "in him" or joined to him. Therefore, the word "seed" can be taken in both its singular and collective meanings, but verse 16 focuses on the singular sense to emphasize the fact that the "true" heir of the promise is Christ.

But what Paul is really saying (v. 17: "what I mean is this"), is that since no one can set aside or add to even a human covenant that has been duly established (v. 15), then "The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise" (v. 17). The inheritance was given to Abraham by promise – by God's sovereign declaration of what he would perform – and ratified in blood. And as we have seen, the promised blessing is applied through faith to those whom God has chosen to believe. The law, which came after, does not affect this, whether we are referring to the promised inheritance or the means by which it is applied (v. 18). Therefore, the principle of justification by faith is preserved despite the formal institution of the law.

Since it is not until verse 17 that Paul applies the illustration he began in verse 15, we could consider verse 16 a parenthesis between the two verses. But the verse contributes to the overall argument. If the inheritance was promised to Abraham and his "seed," and the "seed" is Christ, then the inheritance was promised to Christ. Then, since the inheritance was promised to Christ and "duly established," nothing could interject in the meantime to

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<sup>64</sup> Ryken 120.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 123.

prevent the fulfillment of the promise. But then, once Christ has received the promised inheritance, all those who are joined to him by faith become heirs to it as well. Thus we see that all those who receive justification before God and the gift of the Spirit do so through faith in Christ apart from circumcision or the works of law.

## **GALATIANS 3:19-25**

**What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.**

**Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.**

**Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.**

There is no entirely comfortable way of dividing 3:19-4:7 into manageable sections for study. This is because although a progression of thought is noticeable, one point blends into the next as each transition occurs, so that each section that is taken out from the larger passage still heavily depends on the context. Thus we have chosen to divide the text into 3:19-25 and 3:26-4:7 partly for the sake of convenience. The reader should often refer to 3:19-4:7 as a whole as he considers the details of our text.

The previous passages have established three major points. First, Abraham was himself justified by faith and not works, the law, or circumcision (3:6-9). Second, the law itself teaches the impossibility of justification by the works of law, but rather points to faith as the only way (3:10-14). Third, the law, which came after God's promise to Abraham, does not set aside or add to the promise, which amounts to a declaration of God's intention to save multitudes of people from all over the world and in all periods of history through faith in Christ (3:15-18).

Now that these three points are established, two questions arise concerning the law. First, if the law cannot justify, and if it does not affect the promise, then what is its purpose? Second, if God's blessing comes through faith, and if faith and works exclude each other as the means of justification, then does this mean that the law is in fact opposed to the promises of God, working against them? Whether these are anticipated or actual questions, Paul now proceeds to answer them.

To the first question, Paul answers that the law was added "because of transgressions" (v. 19). It is possible to understand this in a subjective sense, so that the law becomes a divine standard against which we as individuals may measure our motives and actions. And as we perceive that we fall far short of the divine standard (Romans 3:23), we will become

convicted of our sins and a wicked nature that we cannot overcome. This in itself is sound biblical theology. As Paul writes elsewhere, "through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20).

However, since Paul is making his case on the basis of the history of salvation, the objective sense is primary here. Thus the REB translates, "It was added to make wrongdoing a legal offence." The NLT says, "It was given to show people how guilty they are," and that would be true even in the objective sense. That is, the law was given not only to produce subjective conviction within individuals concerning their sinfulness, but to objectively demonstrate people's failure to observe the law and live up to God's standard (Romans 5:20).

The law, he adds, "was put into effect through angels by a mediator" (v. 19b). As Deuteronomy 33:2 and Psalm 68:17 indicate, God delivered the law in the presence of a large company of angels, and by the hand of the mediator Moses (see Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2). Verse 20 might be a little confusing. It seems to make a contrast between law and promise in terms of how they were delivered. Thus the REB translates, "but an intermediary is not needed for one party acting alone, and God is one." God gave the promise directly to Abraham, without the agency of angels or a mediator. This suggests the superiority of promise over law.

To the second question, as to whether the law is opposed to God's promises, Paul answers, "Absolutely not!" The reason he offers also answers the first question, that is, the one regarding the law's purpose. The law does not impart life, he says, but "the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe." In other words, the law does not oppose God's promises, because it was never given to compete against them.

In fact, the law kept the whole world – that is, all people – "locked up" so that it could deliver the chosen ones directly to Christ through faith (v. 23-24). The law, although good and spiritual in itself, was so harsh and stringent toward the sinner as to make it clear that only through the way of faith, provided by God himself through Christ and delivered in the form of a promise, could one receive justification. Therefore, the law could not be opposed to promise, for its function is to serve the promise, and in turn the way of faith.

Where the NIV has the words "put in charge to lead us to" (v. 24), is the term that is translated "guardian" in the ESV. It refers to a slave that has been assigned to escort a child to and from school, and who also watches over his conduct. Although the slave has the authority to apply corporal punishment, he does not teach the child. He is not a teacher, but a disciplinarian.<sup>66</sup> To translate it as "schoolmaster" (KJV) is misleading. Once the child is grown, he is no longer under the authority or "supervision" of the slave guardian (v. 25).

Therefore, the law was given for a purpose, and it is not opposed to the promises of God, since it was given for the purpose of bringing the chosen ones to the promises through faith in Christ.

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<sup>66</sup> Ryken, 139.

## **GALATIANS 3:26-4:7**

**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

**What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.**

The idea of sonship to Abraham was introduced back in 3:7. The Judaizers probably argued that one must become the children of Abraham to inherit the promise that God made to him. One could be born a Jew, and thus a descendent of Abraham and circumcised. Or a non-Jew could convert and submit under the law, along with all the Jewish customs and regulations, including the rite of circumcision. However, Paul has shown that Abraham himself was justified by faith in God's promise, and those who believe are the children of Abraham. Circumcision is irrelevant.

But now Paul says that Christians are not only the children of Abraham, but also the "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus," and these are those who have been "baptized into Christ." Of course, Paul has not been stressing justification by faith alone only to contradict himself here by making water baptism a requirement to justification. We know, for example, that one of the criminals who were crucified with Christ professed faith in him. Nailed to the cross, not only did he have no opportunity to perform any good work, but he did not even receive water baptism. Yet Christ said to him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

That said, we understand that under ordinary circumstances, those who profess faith in Christ are also to be baptized in his name, and indeed there is usually no reason to proceed without it. So the two are sometimes mentioned as if they are interchangeable, although they are strictly not the same. One could have faith in Christ without the baptism and still be justified, but one could be baptized without faith in Christ, and still not be justified, but remain in condemnation. In any case, verses 26-27 affirm the doctrine of adoption, that those who believe in Christ are the sons of God. This is already implied in verse 24.

Believers are "all one in Christ Jesus" (v. 28) and are the sons of God (v. 26). In our context, this supercedes all natural distinctions between individuals, so that in Christ "there is



neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." The rampant misuse of this verse is partly due to a disregard for its context, which is spiritual, and concerns justification before God.

To paraphrase, Paul is saying, "When it comes to justification, and when it comes to being the children of Abraham and the sons of God, it does not matter whether you are Jew or non-Jew, slave or free, male or female. Before you come to Christ, one is not more disadvantaged than the other, for all are condemned according to the divine standard. When you come to Christ, one is not more welcomed than the other, for all must come through the faith that God gives. After you have come to Christ, one is not more privileged than the other, for all are sons of God in him."

However, Paul is by no means saying, "Christ has abolished all racial differences, all class disparities, and all gender distinctions." Although the verse has been used as if it says this, or almost as if it says this, it is far...*far* from what the verse teaches. It cannot be used, for example, to refute alleged differences in the intelligence, disposition, and physiology between races, classes, and genders. Whether these differences exist is a separate question – this verse does not affirm or refute them, since it does not address them at all.

Therefore, the verse cannot be used to refute racism, classism, and sexism outside of the context of this passage, unless where the relevance could be established by necessary inference from the verse. It cannot even be used as an appeal to non-Christians against racism, classism, and sexism, since the lack of distinction referred to here is based on the fact that believers are "all one in Christ Jesus." But unbelievers are not in Christ Jesus, so that believers are not one with them. However, from this verse a legitimate appeal may be made for unbelievers to convert, to become believers, so that they may become one with all believers in Christ, where spiritually speaking, there is this basis to end racism, classism, and sexism.

Even among believers, many distinctions between these groups remain. For example, just because we are "all one in Christ Jesus" does not mean that it is appropriate for a man to walk into a women's restroom in church, claiming that there is neither "male nor female" in Christ. Once we wrest the verse out of its context, one may no longer arbitrarily limit its usage. In fact, we may respond to someone who uses this verse out of its context that according to his usage, the problem that he is trying to address no longer exists.

That is, if in Christ there is neither male nor female in the sense that he understands it, that no gender distinction should remain, then the very idea of sexual discrimination also vanishes. If there is no sexual distinction, there can be no sexual discrimination, and this means that no one who uses the verse in this manner can say that there is such a thing as a victim of sexism. The person is discriminated against as an individual apart from his or her gender. Thus once the verse is used to address what it is not supposed to address, the problem that it is not supposed to address also disappears.

The same applies to the application of this verse to racism and classism. A person's skin color does not change just because he becomes a Christian. And a person does not

automatically possess more or less wealth or status just because he now believes in Christ. All such distinctions between individuals remain. A man is still a man, and a woman is still a woman. The Scripture even gives the two different instructions regarding their roles, and thus insisting on a sharp distinction between the genders, even when it addresses believers.

As a side point, we must never become one-sided when considering discrimination against various groups. Oftentimes the so-called "victims" are just as prejudiced, if not more so. The Jews had suffered immense persecution and oppression, but they were certainly racists themselves, bitter and self-righteous. Sometimes the difference between the oppressor and the oppressed is not that the former is more prejudiced, but that the latter is more boisterous, complaining and extorting undeserved advantages from other members of society. In any case, Scripture commands slaves to obey their masters (Ephesians 6:5-8), and women to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 6:22-24). Even in Christ, natural distinctions remain and are strictly observed.

Verse 29 says that those who "belong" to Christ are "heirs according to the promise," showing that Paul is willing to consider "Abraham's seed" in the plural, as we mentioned in connection with 3:16. Christ is indeed the "true" heir – in him God's promise to Abraham finds ultimate and complete fulfillment. Believers, however, are also properly called the heirs of the promise, but only in Christ.

As we proceed to 4:1, we must keep in mind that Paul is making his case from the perspective of salvation history. This is important for a proper understanding of the rest of the passage. He says that although an heir would inherit the entire estate, he appears no better than a slave before he comes of age. His activities are dictated by guardians and trustees, and he could make no decision regarding the estate that he would one day inherit. And it was the case under certain ancient laws and customs that the father was the one who determined the official time when the child would be considered an adult.

Likewise, when the people of God were children, they were "in slavery under the basic principles of this world." But at the appointed time, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." This is obviously not referring to what happens in the life of each individual, but to some definite periods and events in history – thus the reminder that Paul is speaking from the perspective of salvation history, and not how God deals with individuals.

Verse 6 hearkens back to 3:2 and the other references to the Spirit as the fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham. We are the sons of God, so the Spirit enables us to know and address him as "Abba, Father." In connection with this, we seem to have too much patience with the common misconception that "Abba" is the equivalent of "Daddy" in English – it is not. A son, of course, is also an heir, and one who takes possession of the inheritance (v. 7).

## **GALATIANS 4:8-20**

**Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.**

**I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?**

**Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!**

Paul has argued for his gospel of justification by faith on the basis of his personal history, the Galatians' conversion history, and Scripture's salvation history. His formal arguments are almost complete – one may consider 4:21-31 the actual conclusion. And now he turns to make a direct and personal appeal to his readers to come to their senses regarding this matter.

He reminds them of their former condition. Under paganism, they "did not know God," but they were "slaves to those who by nature are not gods." They adhered to "weak and miserable principles." And this is Paul's estimation of their former religion – they were ignorant, enslaved, and wretched.

In an age when "tolerance" is touted as a supreme virtue, it is unpopular to ascribe such damning terms to non-Christian religions. Even those preachers and theologians who are otherwise faithful to biblical principles attempt to present Christianity as, in some sense, a "tolerant" religion. But tolerance is merely a narrow cultural virtue that is without support from Scripture, and not given sympathy even in many other cultures. Christians are under no obligation to accommodate its irrational principles and implications.

Christianity is nonviolent, but it is not at all tolerant – that is, its stance is one of nonviolent intolerance. This is because it is an authoritative and comprehensive revelation from God.

As such, it is under no obligation to tolerate, entertain, accommodate, compromise with any other religion or philosophy, just as God is under no obligation to do these things with his rebellious creatures. In fact, it would spell spiritual treason to do these things in his name. One important measure of our devotion to God, Scripture, and Truth is in how much we detest and despise non-Christian religions and philosophies.

Tolerance is no virtue – it either means that the tolerant person does not know the truth (so that he must keep an "open" mind), or that he does not value the truth (so that he will not defend truth and destroy error). He is either a fool or a coward. On the other hand, biblical intolerance arises from the knowledge of the truth, the conviction of its importance, and humility and obedience toward God. In any case, Paul is neither a fool nor a coward.

Through the gospel, the Galatians have come to know God, or as Paul quickly adds, "or rather known by God." This sense of "know" is not that of a discovery of new information, as if God did not know about the Galatians before Paul preached to them. Rather, it refers to a personal and intimate relationship. Although the Galatians have come to know God through the gospel, it is God who first came to "know" them in initiating and establishing a personal relationship with them by his sovereign decree. There is embedded here, then, a reminder of the privilege of being among those whom God has chosen for salvation.

Here is the astounding thing. In letting themselves be swayed by the Judaizers, the Galatians are turning away from *this* – a personal relationship with God according to his sovereign grace and election – *back* to the enslavement of paganism. Considering what they are turning away from, and what they are turning back to, the move is completely senseless.

And here is another astounding thing. Paul marvels, "You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!" Yet these are not pagan festivals that he is referring to, but important dates on the Jewish calendar. We understand that there is a sense in which the observance of special days could be tolerated (Romans 14:5-6), but the Galatians are taught to observe them for justification before God and other spiritual attainments. Paul's position is that this is like returning to paganism, back to ignorance and enslavement. And this is also his assessment of the Judaizers' religion. The implication for Catholicism is obvious – although it presents a Christian front, it is a pagan religion. The same condemnation applies to those who attach too much significance to the liturgical calendar in their ministry and worship.

Paul has reminded them of their personal relationship with God, what they would be turning away from and turning back to if they continue to follow the Judaizers' doctrine. But now the apostle appeals to them on the basis of his personal relationship with them. Although it is proper to teach believers to follow Christ rather than his messengers, and to urge them to avoid a party or sectarian spirit, it is in fact unbiblical to give the impression that they are to be completely neutral or even disloyal to their ministers.

Paul writes to Timothy, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner" (2 Timothy 1:8). It is proper for a minister to appeal to personal loyalty

as a secondary argument. Just as our loyalty to Christ should not weaken our loyalty to parents and friends, but rather strengthen it (albeit only "in the Lord"), to discourage personal loyalty to the ministers that God introduces to us in his providence tends to foster the strong fickle tendency that is already dormant in many believers, and to undermine the stability of faith that could be maintained by these relationships.

Paul recalls the initial reception that the Galatians gave him. He was diverted to their area "because of an illness," and while there he preached the gospel to them. Various theories have been offered concerning the nature of the illness. Was it malaria? Was it the "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) that he mentions elsewhere?<sup>67</sup> Some suggest that it could have been an ailment related to his eyes, since Paul writes in verse 15, "if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me." But this is probably just a figure of speech indicating their initial respect and hospitality.

Of course, the precise nature of the illness is unimportant. The important point is that although his condition could have been a stumbling block to the Galatians, they did not despise him, but instead welcomed him "as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself." So Paul appeals to them on the basis of this relationship. What has happened to them that they are now turning away from him? "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

Paul's concern is for them. He regards them as his brothers and children in the Lord, and even now he is in agony because of them. But the Judaizers are zealous to win them over, so that the Galatians may be zealous *for them!* In other words, the false teachers did not have truth or the Galatians' best interest in mind, but they wanted to make followers for themselves. Paul is perplexed that they would turn from a loving and trusting relationship with the apostle, to the destructive and enslaving yoke that the Judaizers now attempts to place upon them. It is, again, a completely senseless move.

Therefore, his personal appeal to them is, "I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you." Paul lived like a Gentile when he was among them (2:14). Consistent with his message, he did not insist on following Jewish customs and regulations for himself, nor did he impose these upon the converts. Now he pleads with the Galatians, "become like me," as one who affirms and practices a gospel of justification by faith in Christ apart from circumcision, the works of the law, or Jewish customs and regulations.

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<sup>67</sup> That is, if the thorn refers to an illness at all.

## **GALATIANS 4:21-31**

**Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.**

**These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."**

**Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.**

This passage presents an allegorical or figurative use of Old Testament narrative. It is often regarded as a piece of rabbinical exegesis in which Paul employs his opponents' method of handling Scripture against them. Perhaps the Galatians have been fascinated by the fanciful exegesis of the Judaizers, and Paul presents to them a more sober and proper handling of the Scripture using allegorical interpretation.

In fact, the case for justification by faith has already been firmly established by this point, and even if this passage does not formally contribute to the argument, it is at least an apt illustration from Scripture that, as we will see, summarizes several important points at the same time. But I would say that the passage does more than this, and does contribute to the overall argument. It is allegorical not in the sense that the historical setting is ignored or that various elements in the narratives are ascribed arbitrary meanings. Rather, it is one illustration of how those theological principles that have been true at all times play themselves out in the stories of God's people (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Verses 22-23 recount the facts concerning Abraham's two sons. Ishmael was conceived through Hagar, a slave woman, and in the ordinary way. Isaac, on the other hand, was conceived through Sarah, a free woman, and according to promise. The slave woman gives birth to slaves, and the free woman gives birth to free children. But Isaac, the child of promise, was conceived by divine power and not the effort of the flesh. Thus although both the children of the flesh and the children of promise claim Abraham as their father, the question is now, "Who is your mother?"

In this illustration, Hagar represents Mount Sinai, and corresponds to the present or earthly Jerusalem, "because she is in slavery with her children." She is the mother of those who depend on the flesh rather than on promise. Accordingly, those who depend on the law are slaves, and not free. But the children of promise (v. 28) are like Isaac – ordained by God's decree and born "by the power of the Spirit" (v. 29). These are free children, not slaves, and are heirs to the inheritance.

And just as the slave child persecuted the free child at that time, so those of a slave religion now persecute those who are the children of promise, born by divine power. With this in mind, the citation of Genesis 21:10 is most significant: "But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.'" Slave religions "will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son," and we know that to Paul the religion of promise is restricted to the gospel of justification by faith in Christ Jesus.

Cole offers an excellent statement on this matter: "The reason why all 'natural' religious systems are bound to come into conflict with Christianity, the 'supernatural' system, is because they cannot co-exist as parallel paths to the same goal. That is why the 'persecution' mentioned above is inevitable. Christianity is in this sense inevitably 'narrow-minded'. This is an unpopular doctrine today when open-minded 'conversation' with non-Christian faiths is often suggested, rather than preaching the gospel."<sup>68</sup>

The way forward is to "get rid of the slave woman and her son." This seems to be Paul's indication that the Judaizers should be expelled from the community of the Galatians, along with their doctrines and practices. And this is also the way that we must treat all religious systems that would enslave us under adherence to Jewish rituals and customs, or inordinate reverence for Jewish culture and ancestry. Some forms of so-called "Messianic Christianity," for example, would subject Christians under such slavery again. Rather than expressing interest and obedience to these doctrines, the false teachers should be expelled from the church community. They do not introduce a superior version of the faith, but rather a slave religion, one that will not share in the inheritance. But there are numerous other applications.

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<sup>68</sup> Cole, 185.

## **GALATIANS 5:1-12**

**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

**Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

**You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!**

Verse 1 is a transition statement, and can be attached to either the end of the previous passage, or the beginning of the present one. First, it summarizes a major thrust of what Paul has been demonstrating by the previous arguments: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Then, it states what we are to do because of this, anticipating what will follow: "Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Positively, believers must stand firm in the freedom that they possess in Christ. Negatively, they must resist all attempts to place them under slavery again, and this means to resist both the practice and the promoters of circumcision.

Paul addresses those who would accept circumcision, and writes that "Christ will be of no value to you at all." As verse 6 indicates, it is not circumcision as such that Paul opposes, or that will render Christ of no value to a person – there he says that even *uncircumcision* is of no value. But in the context of the present crisis, circumcision represents the adoption of works as a way to obtain justification, and as a way of living. This, Paul says, is incompatible with faith in Christ. And a man who accepts circumcision (who depends on works for his justification) is obligated to obey the whole law, so that he is enslaved to it. Since no one can obey the whole law, the person who accepts circumcision is also spiritually doomed.

Verse 4 is especially clear about this incompatibility: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." Anyone who tries to be justified by law is cut off from Christ. Anyone who depends on Christ for his



justification cannot then accept circumcision, as if he depends on the law as well to establish his righteousness or sanctification before God.

A person who tries to be justified by law has "fallen away from grace." To "fall from grace" does not mean to lose the favorable disposition of an important person, although it is true that one who tries to be justified by law cannot also find favor with God. Rather, here the expression means that law and grace are mutually exclusive as principles by which one seeks justification before God.

Those who depend on God's grace do not *work* for their righteousness, but they *wait* for the final revelation of righteousness that will occur on the day when God will publicly pronounce all his chosen ones "justified" in his sight through faith in Christ (v. 5). Again, Paul is not referring to the physical procedure of circumcision, but the theological (and here legalistic) reason behind it (v. 6a), so that circumcision has no value, and *uncircumcision* has no value (1 Corinthians 7:19).

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." So it is not that faith does not perform works, only that it does not perform works in order to obtain justification. The works of law that strive to obtain a righteous standing before God is bound to failure, and is opposed to the way of grace. But the works *of faith* proceed from a person who is already justified through faith in Christ.

Paul turns his attention to those who would advance circumcision, that is, as a way to attain righteousness or spirituality. The Galatians have been advancing in the faith, but the Judaizers have cut in on them with their false doctrine, preventing them from obeying the truth. Contrary to what these legalists claim, rather than introducing a superior system to the Galatians, their doctrine is impeding their progress. This message is not from God, and it will spread like a contagious disease if left unchecked (v. 8-9).

The apostle expresses confidence that the Galatians "will take no other view." As for the Judaizers, Paul's attitude toward them has been consistently hostile and condemnatory. He probably has the leader of these agitators in mind when he writes that this person will "pay the penalty, whoever he may be." He is most likely referring to God's judgment. To say "whoever" does not necessarily suggest that Paul does not know who this person is, but it means that he will "pay the penalty" regardless of his identity or status.

Of course, there were more than one false teachers, for then Paul refers to "the agitators." And here comes a statement that would astound and offend many modern readers: "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" Suppose some Jews were to tell my converts to get circumcised in order to be saved or to become better believers. Now if I were to say that they will pay for it, and that I wish they would castrate themselves, I would probably be denounced as an unloving extremist, and the strongest criticisms would most likely come from those who call themselves Christians.

But this is exactly what Paul says about the Judaizers. It is true that ritual castration was practiced by some pagan religions, and Paul seems to again classify the Jews' misuse of the

law with paganism. To the ancient Jews, this does not decrease the offense, but greatly increases it. Those professing Christians who protest in heated indignation when this type of rhetoric is used against false teachers betray their own enslavement to the worldly ethic and etiquette of their culture. Scripture thinks that such talk is entirely appropriate, so that their attitude demonstrates nothing of the holiness of God or the love of Christ.

## **GALATIANS 5:13-26**

**You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.**

**So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.**

**The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.**

One objection against the message of grace, the gospel of justification by faith apart from works, is that it implies antinomianism (lawlessness), which leads to gross moral licentiousness. Before considering Paul's answer, we must first recognize that although this objection pertains to an important issue, it is not strictly relevant to the debate – it is a pragmatic argument that does not directly support the principle of justification by works or refute the gospel of justification by faith.

That said, there are indeed those who slip into an antinomian mindset and licentious conduct once they claim to affirm justification by faith. But even at an earlier point Paul has demonstrated that this can occur only due to a disregard for the actual teaching of the gospel (2:17-20). Now as Paul begins a concluding section on the ethical applications of the theological principles previously established, he writes, "do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature." The kind of freedom that Christ gives is not the freedom to sin. The word translated "sinful nature" in the NIV is *sarx*, or flesh. In Paul's writings, as it is here (v. 16-26), it is often used in contrast to *pneuma*, or spirit. The NIV's translation gives the meaning, but in doing so obscures the contrast.

Rather than using their freedom as a pretext or springboard to indulge their sinful nature, they are to "serve one another in love." The literal meaning here is to be servants or slaves to one another. After telling the Galatians to "stand firm" on their freedom in Christ, Paul

is not now contradicting himself by saying that they should become slaves in the sense of enslavement to the law. Christ has set us free from a type of bondage that is burdensome and oppressive, and that results in death and not life. But now he tells his readers to serve one another *in love*, and not under legalistic compulsion.

Paul continues, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Notice what he is *not* saying. He is not saying that for Christians there is no longer any law or ethical standard. Rather, he tells them to serve one another, and to do so because of love, on the basis of the law itself. And he is not saying that the Old Testament law is now replaced by some novel New Testament standard, since "love your neighbor as yourself" also comes from the law (Leviticus 19:18).

Further, he is not saying that we can disregard the rest of God's moral precepts if we will keep in mind just the one: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is because the "love" in this command is itself defined and explained by the other precepts of the law. The command merely sums up or fulfills all the other commands that pertain to human relationships. But if the former sums up or fulfills the latter, then means that the latter is not ignored or abolished, but rather respected and carried out by the former (Romans 13:8-10).

What is it then? Paul never said that the law has been abolished in every sense, or that its ethical demands are now irrelevant. Murder is still murder, adultery is still adultery, and theft is still theft. In fact, the Scripture declares, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). This is what has happened in the hearts of those who believe. That is, they are to truly fulfill the law, not as those who seek justification through works, but as those who have been justified through faith in Christ.<sup>69</sup>

The way to avoid indulging the flesh is to "live by the Spirit" (v. 16), or literally to "walk" by the Spirit. This does not mean to follow the Spirit in some mystical sense, but the idea is ethical (v. 19-26). With this, Paul begins to make a sharp contrast, and even sets up an opposition, between the flesh and the Spirit. Their desires are "contrary" to each other, and they are "in conflict" with each other. To be agreeable to one is to be against the other. Thus Paul says to "live by the Spirit" (v. 16) or be "led by the Spirit" (v. 18), or to "keep in step with the Spirit" (v. 25).

There is an important application in developing holiness. In recognizing and resisting the desires of the flesh, the Christian must not allow his focus to become purely negative. Because the flesh and the Spirit are so opposed to each other, when his energy is directed toward loving God and neighbor, and toward keeping in step with the Spirit, he will by necessity not gratify the flesh. Such an approach also naturally avoids a legalistic mindset.

Continuing the contrast, Paul provides two catalogs illustrating the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Under the works of the flesh he lists sexual, religious, mental, emotional, and relational sins. Some of the items appear to overlap. Since he concludes the

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<sup>69</sup> For more on the law, see Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

list with "and the like," these items are meant to illustrate, and not intended as a perfectly proportioned representative list of the works of the flesh.

The same can be said concerning the list of the fruit of the Spirit – it is not necessarily exhaustive, but the items illustrate the virtues that the Spirit produces in the believer. Even the legalists cannot argue against things like love, patience, kindness, and self-control – "against these things there is no law."

In telling the Galatians not to indulge the flesh, Paul is not adding to this message of grace or backtracking from his previous arguments in the letter. He reminds the readers that he already told them about these things before (v. 21), and even that "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" – that is, those who live like this are not even Christians.

So it has been his consistent teaching to advocate grace without condoning licentiousness. On the other hand, as he has stated in 2:19-20, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (v. 24). And now they should and could "keep in step with the Spirit" (v. 25).

## **GALATIANS 6:1-10**

**Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.**

**Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.**

**Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**

To walk in the Spirit, as we mentioned, is not a mystical concept but an ethical one. Paul gives concrete expression to the idea by applying it to two things: personal relationships (v. 1-5) and financial giving (v. 6-10).<sup>70</sup>

First he addresses how Christians are to deal with someone caught in a sin. We cannot be sure if Paul is bringing this up to forestall a possible overly violent reaction that some Galatians might have after reading the letter against the legalistic assault on the church. Perhaps those who have never been influenced by the Judaizers' doctrine would seize this occasion to condemn in a destructive manner those who were being swayed by it. Then again, perhaps Paul is mentioning this only as a principle important to the healthy development of a congregation.

In any case, the instruction is that "you who are spiritual should restore him gently." We could understand this to say, "If you are spiritual, you will restore him gently," or "This gentle restoration should be done by those who are spiritual." Either, of course, would be true and consistent with the context. Although the former is relevant to the earlier contrast between flesh and Spirit (v. 16-26), to restore someone spiritually indeed requires knowledge, skill, and maturity: "But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

That the instruction is to "restore" is also significant in the alternatives that it excludes. When a brother is caught in a sin, do we rejoice in his fall? Do we, out of malice or jealousy, publicize his failure? Or, do we overlook and trivialize his sin? All these are acts of the

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<sup>70</sup> Boice, 501.

flesh, and not of the Spirit. Paul says, "you who are spiritual should *restore* him." This would involve confrontation, correction, instruction, and continual encouragement in directing the erring brother back to the right path.

In so bearing the heavy burdens of others, we fulfill the law of Christ. At least two things would hinder someone from becoming involved with other believers in this manner. First, perhaps "he thinks he is something when he is nothing," but here "he deceives himself." No one should think so highly of himself as to think that he is above caring for his brothers in the Lord. A second destructive tendency is constant comparison with others, and to draw illegitimate conclusions from his supposed inferiority or superiority to his brothers. No, Paul says he should examine himself against the law of Christ, and not to compare himself to others, but rather to carry their burdens as they have need.

Verse 6 might appear to mark a transition to a new topic, but its relevance to carrying other people's burdens and to fulfilling the law of Christ should not be lost to us. No less important is the connection that he makes with sowing and reaping: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Of course, the principle could – and surely does – refer to our moral habits, as to whether we would walk in the Spirit rather than indulge the desires of the flesh (5:16-26). But here the immediate context concerns whether the Christians extend financial support to those who give them "instruction in the word." Paul indicates that to withhold such financial support is to mock God. To neglect or abuse his ministers is to hold in contempt the one who has sent them.

The principle certainly applies to our eternal harvest, our reward in heaven. But there is a payoff even in the present world. Ministers who are faithful and valiant for the word of God are usually more effective in their work when they are well-supported, so that they could devote themselves to the propagation of sound doctrine. The result is a bountiful spiritual harvest.

On the other hand, when believers indulge their fleshly desires and invest in the things of the flesh instead of the things of the spirit, they reap doctrinal confusion, moral corruption, and all kinds of social ills. They sow into the flesh, and what they reap is a world full of false religions, perverted morality, violence and chaos. Not only do they themselves are then made to suffer these consequences, but their children, and their children's children are also made to endure the evil harvest. Thus "God cannot be mocked" – what we sow, we will indeed reap. The harvest may not be instant, but whether we sow to the Spirit or the flesh, it is inevitable that we will also reap the corresponding consequences.

## **GALATIANS 6:11-18**

**See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!**

**Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.**

**Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.**

Paul has been writing through an amanuensis. But at this point he takes the pen from his scribe, and brings the letter to a close. As he does so, he wishes to show his sincerity and strength of conviction. He pens the conclusion of the letter with his own hand, writing in large letters. And in verse 17, he writes, "Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." He is certain about and committed to his message, declaring in large letters (as if in a strong and emphatic voice), that he has the scars to prove it.

In comparison, the Judaizers are insincere and weak. They wish to make a good impression, to avoid persecution due to the offense of the cross of Christ, and to boast in the disciples that they gather for themselves, and whom they made to receive circumcision. But while they make so much noise about circumcision, they themselves do not obey the law. But Paul would boast only in the work of Christ.

Verse 15 echoes what he says earlier in 5:6. In both places he says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. In 5:6, he says that it is rather "faith expressing itself through love" that counts, and here it is a "new creation." A benediction falls on "all who follow this rule, even the Israel of God." Those who disregard circumcision or uncircumcision, but rather emphasize faith and a new creation are, of course, those who affirm justification by faith in Christ, or the Christians. In other words, the Church alone is the true Israel of God. The rest, whether Jew or non-Jew, are excluded and assigned to the outer darkness.